



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Statement by Minister Edna Molewa at the Acid Mine Drainage media briefing -Rand Fontein West Rand 22 March 2012

Today, the 22nd of March is World Water Day, this is a day dedicated by the United Nations to increasing awareness around the importance of water in our lives, the environment, in health, agriculture and for our economy. We therefore thought it appropriate to come here to the Witwatersrand to show you the effects that decades of reckless and poorly regulated mining activities have had on our precious water resources. This is a problem that is not unique to this area but this is where it requires the most urgent attention.

The issue of Acid Mine Drainage is one that the Government takes very seriously and is committed to resolving. I want to make it clear that the Department of Water Affairs and I speak for all other departments that are involved in dealing with this challenge. Even though the current government inherited the problem of AMD we are intensifying our efforts and making noteworthy progress.

Our government in particular my Department has been accused of not doing anything to resolve this issue while at other times the charge has been that we are not doing enough. You have seen for yourself the work that is being done, I trust that will give you some indication of our commitment.

In 2010, Cabinet appointed an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) to investigate the challenges posed by AMD in the Witwatersrand Goldfields area, between Randfontein in the West and Nigel in the east. Through a Technical Committee, co-chaired by the Directors General of the Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) and the Department of Water Affairs (DWA), a Team of Experts was appointed and a draft AMD report was presented to Cabinet on the 9th of February 2011.

The Experts Report outlined short, medium and long term interventions and specifically recommended the following short term solutions, which the IMC approved for emergency implementation:

- Installation of pumps to extract AMD from mines to on-site treatment plants.
- Construction of on-site water treatment plants in each basin, with the option of refurbishing and upgrading existing treatment facilities owned by the mines.

- Installation of infrastructure to convey treated water to discharge into nearby water courses.

In April last year, I directed the TCTA to undertake emergency works related to water management of AMD. The work undertaken constitutes the Phase 1 of the Long Term Solution to deal with the problem of Acid Mine Drainage on the Witwatersrand.

The main objectives of this phase are:

- Treating the current uncontrolled AMD decant on the Western Basin (this intervention is known as “the immediate solution”).
- Drawing down the Acid Mine Drainage in the Western Basin by pumping to what it is known as the Environmental Critical Level, (this is the highest water level in the mine void which can be allowed without the mine water negatively impacting on the shallow ground water aquifers and the surface water resources).
- Preventing the rising water levels in the mine voids from exceeding the ECL’s in the Central and Eastern Basins.
- Treating the current uncontrolled AMD decant occurring on the Western Basin involves upgrading the Rand Uranium treatment plant. This plant consists of four parallel treatment process units, of which only one unit is operational and is currently being used to treat mine water at a peak rate of 12 million litres per day.

Work commenced in December 2011 to upgrade the Rand Uranium plant to treat a total capacity of 30 million litres of mine water per day.

The commissioning of the fully upgraded plant is set for April 2012.

I am also pleased to announce that my Department has already commissioned a feasibility study for the long-term solution to address Acid Mine Drainage associated with the East, Central and West Rand Underground Mining Basins. A team of consultants will be responsible for conducting this study over the next 13 months (ending in Feb 2013). The study will focus on investigating possible management scenarios, an analysis of technical options, and optimal infrastructure configuration, as well as recommend suitable institutional and financial models and a suggested implementation plan to provide a sustainable long-term solution.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would now like to talk briefly about the so called short fall in the budget allocated to deal with the AMD challenges. It will cost approximately nine hundred million to a billion Rand to implement the short term solution. The current budget is R433 million. In order to address this funding gap, the smooth integration between the short and the long term solution is essential. I have therefore recently in partnership with the Department of Mineral Resources, instructed my Department to explore the possibility of testing the open market asking for interest to deal with AMD. The responses are expected to deal with all aspects of AMD including institutional matters, financial matters, technology as well as the operation and maintenance of the pump stations and treatment plants. I am awaiting feedback and

once we have more clarity on the way forward and the process that could be followed to speed up the implementation of the long term solutions, my Department will make further announcements in this regard. I will also then report back to the relevant Inter Ministerial Committee.

I thank you