



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

STATEMENT BY MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS MRS EDNA MOLEWA AT THE LAUNCH OF NATIONAL WATER WEEK 2012 5 MARCH 2012 – VAAL DAM

As you are aware National Water Week is a flagship campaign of the Department of Water Affairs. During this important period on our Departmental calendar and indeed on that of our country, we seek to draw the attention of all our citizens to the crucial role that water plays in our lives and to remind everyone that we live in a water scarce country that is characterised by periods of drought in some parts and also flooding in others. This year we celebrate Water Week under the theme: **Water is life: Respect it, Conserve it, and enjoy it.** I think the message here is clear.

We have brought you here today to the launch of National Water Week at the Vaal Dam, an important national resource that meets the water resource needs of 60% of the national economy and serves 45%, or 20 million, of the people in the country. One of the important characteristics of the Vaal River System is that a substantial quantity of water is transferred in from the Thukela and the Usutu rivers in KwaZulu-Natal and the Senqu River in Lesotho. The Vaal River serves as a conduit to transfer water to the Upper, Middle and Lower Vaal Water Management Areas (WMA's). The Lesotho Highlands Water Project has an existing yield of 2986 million m³/a (cubic meter per annum) into the Vaal system. This clearly demonstrates the crucial role this system plays in our countries economy.

Due to the importance of this system we identified the need to further augment its water supply. The next augmentation to the system is Phase 2 of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project. Implementation of phase 2 was approved by Cabinet in December 2008. This will put an additional 151 million m³/a (cubic meters per annum) of water to the existing yield of 2986 million m³/a (cubic meter per annum) by the year 2020. With further water resource development, Phase 2 of the Lesotho High lands Water Project can supply an additional 286 million m³/a to the system by

this 2035. As you can see ladies and gentlemen, our planning within the Department is strong and efforts to ensure security of water supply are ongoing.

The economic contribution of the Vaal System to the country would not be complete if did not address the problem of access especially for poor communities and emerging farmers. So far, we have few historically disadvantaged individuals (HDI) who have benefitted on the Validation and Verification Process and a few General Authorisations issued for HDI farmers along the Vaal System. Through this process we have ensured that we return the actual volumes of water to the rightful owners. In future and on a much bigger scale, we intend to implement compulsory licensing.

However this system faces many challenges. In this river system a total estimated volume of 229 million m³/a (cubic meters of water per annum) has been identified as possible unlawful water use by irrigation farmers. That is why we felt it is important for us to improve our enforcement initiatives here. Over abstraction and continued Illegal water use could have significant economic implications for the country as a whole and it is therefore crucial that we act against identified transgressors.

Today we issued a directive to a farmer who has been abstracting water illegally. He is not the only one engaged in unlawful water use in this system there are many others. I do however wish to acknowledge those farmers who are complying and using only the amount of water they are authorised to use. To them I want to say thank you for not breaking the law. To those violating the positions of your water use licence and thereby going against the prescripts of the National Water Act, we will find you and prosecute you.

As I said earlier, this system faces a number of challenges. The issue of pollution is a serious threat to the Vaal system. Pollution occurs here as a result of poor management practices at Waste Water Treatment Works, discharges of poor effluent quality from industries and mines and Acid Mine Drainage which is caused by untreated water from mining voids and abandoned mines along the Vaal River.

I will now turn briefly to another important and disturbing issue - that of pollution. We have identified salinisation, eutrophication and microbial pollution as the three major causes of deteriorating water quality in the Vaal System. To improve the water quality in the system, my Department is implementing various interventions which include the determination of in-stream fitness-for-use Resource Water Quality Objectives, improving source controls to prevent and minimise water pollution at source and improving management of the water resources through more effective monitoring, assessment, reporting and management participation.

Let me also share with you the work we are currently doing around Acid Mine drainage (AMD). You are aware that the Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority (TCTA) has reported progress in the implementation of the short term solutions of the Acid Mine Drainage project (AMD) as approved by cabinet. It is important to note that the emergency or immediate solution as the first phase of the short term solution was

developed exclusively for the Western Basin in order to address the current surface decant of acid mine water into the Tweelopie Spruit. National Treasury allocated R433 million for the implementation of the short term solution. The emergency solution will increase the partial treatment of AMD (neutralization of acid and removal of heavy metals) from 12 million litres (ML) per day to 30 ML per day.

It is envisaged that the short-term solutions will maintain underground mine water levels in the East Rand and Central Rand mining basins by protecting the environmental critical levels and also preventing surface decant of AMD in these basins. The water level in the Western Basin also needs to be drawn to the environmental critical level. The long term feasibility study has already begun. It will help us to determine amongst others which institutional model to use as well as the potential water use of the treated AMD.

In conclusion as we celebrate National Water Week I am calling on all South Africans to, as this year's theme suggests: **Respect, Conserve and Enjoy water.**

I thank you

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