



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

SPEECH BY MINISTER EDNA MOLEWA DURING NATIONAL WATER WEEK LAUNCH

National Water Week Launch, 05 March 2012, Vaal Dam

Programme Director

Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Prof. Hlengiwe Mkhize

MEC for Cooperative Governance, Mr Memezi

Honorable Mayors

Ladies and Gentlemen

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you to this important event. Most importantly to see all of us here with a common purpose, that of reminding South Africans about their individual responsibility towards water. During this water week and beyond, not only should we remind the citizens of our country about responsible water use, we must indeed through our own actions, in our various capacities in the sector do our part and lead by example.

This theme: *Water is Life, Respect it, Conserve it, Enjoy it*, is a clarion call to all of us to start thinking carefully for our own future and that of generations to come when it comes to how we manage and use our water resources. If you respect something, you will not squander it, you will nurture and conserve it, and ultimately you will enjoy it.

But ladies and gentlemen it doesn't end there. We have a responsibility as government and custodians of the water resources to make sure that this resource is shared as well. There are many communities in our country who still don't have access to water. Women and children from places like Pitsonderwater still have to walk hundreds of

kilometers to fetch water and sometimes come back empty handed because the “pits” are indeed without water. Yet there are others, who have it in abundance and sometimes take it for granted that water is a given.

Water availability ladies and gentlemen is not a given. It must be worked for, creatively, innovatively and with the idea of sustainability always in our minds. It can never be treated as abundant, anywhere, more so in our country where rainfall patterns are uneven. Every user has a duty of care for the resource and to use water efficiently. Water is a shared asset. This applies to all water, everywhere.

March is a very important month in the calendar of our country during which we celebrate the twin essentials for human survival, human rights and water. Indeed we are one of the few countries in the world who guarantees water as a human right in the bill of rights in our constitution. Therefore, to achieve this fundamental human right and create access to quality drinking water for all our people, we must stick to fundamentals – respect, conserve, share in order to enjoy.

We must work hard to reduce water losses and wastage. Every factory, every farm, every industry and every individual must play their role in respecting and saving water. We must cut back on unnecessary use, we must clamp down on illegal abstraction. We need to be steadfast in achieving our targeted total savings of 15% across the entire country and far more in some areas and sectors. If we don't do these things, we will face shortages. Water “outages” will become more and more frequent and our economy and welfare will suffer. We don't want that and therefore we must partner together with all citizens, each taking their own responsibility at home, at work and everywhere.

We need to confront the scourges that threaten the integrity of this resource including the problems we are highlighting here at the Vaal today. Water quality deterioration through pollution from agricultural, industrial and mining activities, and because of poor urban wastewater management, is arguably the most serious threat to the country's water resources.

There is a ray of light with the fact that the treatment and reuse of poor quality water, especially acid mine drainage, offers us an opportunity to solve a supply as well as a pollution problem. Already in July last year, the Department completed a national assessment of the water quality of water resources for all Water Management Areas. Arising from this, various strategies have been proposed along with the actions necessary to manage the risks that were identified. We must forge ahead with the implementation of such strategies.

Ladies and Gentlemen we have learned to live with a very variable climate and with very limited rainfall. It has taken much ingenuity, at great cost, to capture and distribute

the little water that we have. We now have to recognise that the situation may get worse, either as rainfall declines, as is expected along the west coast, or becomes more variable and extreme in its occurrence in the central and eastern parts of the country.

Temperatures are also rising, increasing evaporation. This affects all of us, increasing the need to store sufficient water. Climate change also adds to the challenge – but also to the responsibility of all South Africans to act with ever greater care in the utilization of our water. On our part as government and our partners in the sector, we must explore all sources of water. From groundwater to the reuse of water, and the desalination of mining effluent, brackish groundwater, and seawater. The challenge is enormous but not insurmountable.

In this area alone, which is by all standards an important economic hub of our country, there is a lot of work that we are doing to ensure the security of supply. The Vaal River System meets the water resource needs of 60% of the national economy and serves 45%, or 20 million people in the country. That is almost half the population of South Africa that relies on this system. This points to its importance and the need for us to redouble our efforts in dealing with such challenges as we confront today.

The area supplied by the Vaal River System stretches far beyond the catchment boundaries of the Vaal River and includes most of Gauteng, Eskom's power-stations and Sasol's petro-chemical plants on the Mpumalanga Highveld, the North-West and Free State goldfields around Klerksdorp and Welkom. The iron and manganese mines in the Northern Cape, Kimberley, several small towns along the main course of the river as well as several large irrigation schemes also benefit from the Vaal system.

The system will soon be extended to also supply water to the developments on the Waterberg coal-fields near the town of Lephalale. We must also note that a substantial quantity of water from the Vaal River System is transferred in from the Thukela, the Usutu and the Senqu (in Lesotho) rivers.

We have also concluded the next augmentation to the system through the Phase 2 of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project and we are well underway with implementation in this regard. This will add an additional 151 million m³/a to the existing yield of 2986 million m³/a (cubic meter per annum) by the year 2020. With further water resource development in the Orange, Phase 2 of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project can supply an additional 286 million m³/a to the system by this 2020, giving a total yield of 3423 million m³/a for the Vaal River System.

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.

Ladies and gentlemen let me conclude by reminding you of these important facts, that: Opportunities to construct more dams are limited. The little additional surface water there is, is becoming increasingly distant from the user and more expensive both to store and to supply.

We need to manage our catchments for sustainable water supply. This requires attention to land care, to the rehabilitation of eroded lands, and to the clearing of invasive alien plants.

Optimal use should be made of local sources of water (typically groundwater), and this will require growing and diverse skills in water resource management. The supply and management of our water offers a very important career opportunity in this regard.

I wish you success in your various water awareness programmes this week

Thank You