



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**Draft Opening Speech by
Honourable Minister of the Department of Water Affairs, South Africa
Mrs Edna Molewa
at the
13th Biennial Groundwater Conference 2013, Durban, Elangeni Hotel, KwaZulu-
Natal, 17 – 19 September 2013**

Protocol

Chairperson, and

Ladies and gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure to give the opening address at this 13th Groundwater Conference. The National Water Act requires the water resources of South Africa to be developed, used, protected, conserved, managed and controlled to achieve efficiency, equity and sustainability. These functions apply to both groundwater as well as surface water.

On several occasions I have expressed my views about the importance of groundwater and groundwater utilization in South Africa and I want to re-iterate a few facts as was conveyed to me by the Department's groundwater experts:-

- The annually utilizable groundwater resources in South Africa, are in the same order of magnitude as the surface water sources, that is 7 000 to 10 000 million m³/a*
- At this point only about 20% of this volume is used – and this figure presents a large unused resource base that can be used in the growth and development citizens of this country.*

The benefits, I am told are:

- Groundwater resources are fairly cheap and fast to develop;*
- They are available virtually on your doorstep although not always in the quantities one would like to it be;*
- Most of the groundwater in the country is of potable quality – and fortunately the areas where qualities are below standards have been mapped.*
- With our country's (thirsty) population of about 52 million, groundwater can reduce the strain of high water demand from surface water*

resources; either as a sole supply source or by way of augmenting the already out-stripped surface resources. This will also promote the conjunctive use of both these resources efficiently.

The best possible estimate for groundwater use I was provided with is that groundwater already contributes about 20% to the water household in the country as mentioned earlier in the following manner:-

- More than 420 towns in South Africa are totally or largely dependent on groundwater - these towns will have formal domestic water reticulation systems;
- About 80% of 23 600+ rural villages are totally dependent on groundwater – communal access points for domestic water is prevalent in these communities;
- Many areas in the RSA use groundwater solely for irrigation, e.g. Houdenbrak-area, Coetzer-Louwna area, etc.

However, I also understand that there are threats against this strategic resource, some of which are

- Acid Mine Water polluting surface water sources;
- Lack of groundwater management leading to distrust in groundwater as a source. It is evident that management of groundwater resources is important for the resource to be sustainable.
- Lack of institutional capacity to implement/utilise the existing groundwater management tools;

There are also potential solutions to the threats mentioned and these can be divided into technical and institutional solutions.

The potential Technical solutions are:

- To entrench groundwater fully in Water Services Development Plans (WSDP), Integrated Development Plans (IDP);

While the potential Institutional solutions are:

- To ensure that municipalities implement the Reconciliation Strategy (also known as the All Town Study) by incorporating this fully into their relevant Water Services Development Plans (WSDP) and Integrated Development Plans (IDP);
- From my Department's side I would expect improvements with both the RBIG- as well as MIG-policies in terms of groundwater development and utilization.

Ladies and gentlemen, we should also strive to see the good with regards to our water resources. Hence, I am privileged to mention some of the things that we have achieved which is progress with regards to groundwater. These are, inter alia: -

- National Water Act which recognises groundwater as a integral part of the hydrological cycle;
- National Groundwater Archive (containing 250 000+ geosite records);

- *Hydrogeological Map series (21 maps at scale 1:500 000 covering the RSA);*
- *Groundwater Resources Assessment Phase II – adding the third and fourth dimension to the knowledge of the groundwater resource base in the RSA;*
- *National Groundwater Strategy that maps out all the good as well as not so good things about groundwater in the RSA;*
- *NORAD Toolkit for groundwater management and WRC-funded ‘Groundwater Management Framework’, Cap-NET Groundwater Management Training material, etc;*
- *Four WRC-funded publications on the four major aquifer types occurring in the RSA, i.e. Karoo aquifers, Table Mountain Sandstone aquifers, Crystalline Basement aquifers and Karst aquifers (not yet published).*

The National development plan sets out bold plans and interventions to be achieved by 2030. Water plays a key role in most developmental plans. With a large portion of the country being served by groundwater, it is vital to frame the future role of groundwater within this developmental agenda. The demand and pressures on our groundwater resources will increase into the future. The role of the groundwater professionals is likely to increase and the groundwater community should be prepared to engage society on the efficient management of this finite resource to ensure social, economic and environmental security. The way groundwater is perceived by society and specifically decision-makers needs to effect a positive change.

During my Budget Speeches and on local Radio talk shows I have expressed my wish that groundwater management must improve, that municipal managers should be trained to manage their groundwater resources. The DWA 2020 vision to provide education around the importance of water saving, integrated water resources management, climate change and environment including water-related careers should be used as a tool to deal with the management and protection of groundwater resources.

Chairperson, I must commend the Groundwater Division of the GSSA for its efforts of bringing together the groundwater experts from South Africa and abroad to share their research knowledge and experience, especially during this United Nations’ International Year of Water Cooperation. This exchange of knowledge and information will go a long way in ensuring proper management and efficient distribution of our groundwater resources for the long-term sustainability and adequate supply of water to the citizens of this country.

On that note, it is my pleasure to declare the 13th Biennial Groundwater Conference officially opened.

I wish you a successful conference and I look forward to the outcomes of your deliberations.

I thank you.