



water affairs

Department:
Water Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL
AFFAIRS, MRS EDNA MOLEWA AT THE WRC WATER
INNOVATION SYMPOSIUM, CSIR CONFERENCE CENTRE,
PRETORIA
26 SEPTEMBER 2013**

Programme Director

Members of Parliament

Representatives of the Diplomatic Corps

WRC Board Members

WRC CEO, Mr. Dhesigen Naidoo

*Acting Director-General of the DWA, Mr. Trevor Balzer and officials from the
Department*

Officials from the Department of Science and Technology

Representatives of the media

Ladies and gentlemen

*I greatly appreciate the invitation and opportunity to address this august audience
this morning and I commend the WRC for the foresight in facilitating this gathering.*

*We are gathered here today to celebrate excellence and impact of scientific and
technological advancement on water and access thereto. This really is apt as it does
not just happen in a vacuum but speaks to the decision by the United Nations to
declare 2013 as the United Nations' International Year of Water Cooperation. It is
also timely as it happens on the back of our National Heritage Day celebrations
which happened just two days ago. I believe this is an indication that we are on the
right path as a country to correct the imbalances of the past and their manifestations
on the management of South Africa's water resources.*

In just under two decades of our democratic and ANC government, we have managed to increase access to clean and safe drinking water from 59% in 1994 to a national average of 95.2%. Within that we have observed and as confirmed by Census 2011, between 9 to 10% of existing infrastructure services are not functional. This actually reduces our national access to 86%. Therefore, as we deal with the current 4,8% backlog, we need to also address issues of dysfunctionality of some of our infrastructure.

Ladies and gentlemen, the strides we have all made are huge and impactful but have not adequately addressed the issues of equity and redistribution. The opportunity is now on our doorstep as we approach the third decade of democratic governance, to do so with the resolute mentality that the next decade should be a decade of equity and redistribution.

*The topic for discussion: '**Local Water Solutions for Global Impact**', is not just self-explanatory but very strong too. It directs us to what we need to be looking into and what the expected outcomes should be about.*

While we as a community of practice working in and for water should be extremely proud of the achievements we have made, we must also remain cognisant of the challenges that lie ahead of us.

This requires the continued dedication of water researchers and scientists of this country to be at the centre of our ability to ensure that our new water strategy results in genuine improvement in the lives of South Africans. I have to stress that the growth of good and relevant water science and technology is critically important for us to be able to achieve this.

As policy-makers we are grateful when good quality research is able to inform policy. You will be aware of the research published by the WRC, launched during our National Water week commemorations, which indicated that non-revenue water for urban supply systems was at 36,8% over the past six years, equal to 1580 million cubic meters per annum. This is naturally of great concern for a country that is water stressed such as ours. Research findings such as this have proven immensely helpful in developing water-use efficiency initiatives and are most appreciated.

We also rely on the scientific community to assist planning processes. In this stead, we rely on and appreciate the work of the WRC and its partners to lead national initiatives aimed at securing the future of the country's water assets, such as the Water Resources 2012 (WR2012) study, which will provide the blueprint on which all water resource management decisions will be made. This study will be completed in 2016 and will provide a national water resource assessment of all surface and groundwater in the country.

In the Research & Development (R&D) space, the South African water community has recognized that there is poor co-ordination between different stakeholders. As we are all aware, this often leaves research sitting at the pilot stage with public and private sector reluctant to adopt new technologies due to risk aversion linked to red tape, complex regulatory environment, funds and lack of suitable skilled human capital. It has been identified that the users of technology may not be close enough to the research in South Africa preferring off the shelf technology since their planning timeframes are shorter than the longer research horizons. Similarly, researchers are criticised for being unable to turn their research into products and commercialise them and tend to focus on academic outputs rather than technological solutions. There is clearly a need to close these gaps and start to give entrepreneurs, who may not be researchers, incentives to invest in product proto-typing and commercialisation as part of an opportunity to adopt, adapt and diffuse new technologies/solutions.

Today, the South African water sector is at yet another defining moment of paradigmatic change. In contrast to the policy precipice that presided over the late 1990s and early 2000s when national water law in South Africa was democratised, we have recently entered a critically important phase of policy review – the National Water Resource Strategy-2 (NWRS-2) has been approved. Cabinet approved the gazetting and a public consultation process on the National Water Policy Review, which will eventually result in an amendment bill that will update the National Water Act and the Water Services Act – possibly into one Act.

Of course, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee will soon hold public hearings on the Water Research Amendment Bill, 2013.

As South African policy-makers and citizens we now have the opportunity to reflect on key issues of water quality and access as well as the management of this critically important resource, and the reform/transformation/improvement of a legislative framework to enable us to do this better.

Ladies and gentlemen I have to emphasise this: the voice of the scientific community is critically important in providing policy-makers with scientific evidence to inform a holistic and integrated policy review process.

As you continue with your deliberations over the next two days, I encourage you to jointly develop ways to communicate your science to inform appropriate policy and programmatic implementation.

Most of all, we cannot progress as a country unless and until our technological advances are used for the good of all humanity. We are a water-scarce country; therefore our scientific water-related innovations and developments, including some embedded within indigenous knowledge, must and will assist us to make the necessary advances towards the sustainable management of our water resources.

We have a collective responsibility as scientists and policy-makers, to hold hands and assist one another in our endeavours. We need to understand that we are jointly responsible to ensure that the people of this country and ultimately the region and continent depend on us to find one another, find solutions to the issues surrounding the capacity of the state to be able to achieve and sustain access to good quality water to all of us.

Water truly is a catalyst for socio-economic development. We must all remember that access to good quality water is a constitutional right in our country. I therefore hereby enjoin all of us to work together to ensure all citizens of South Africa enjoy this right.

I thank you.