



## water & sanitation

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Department:  
Water and Sanitation  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

### **SPEAKING NOTES FOR MINISTER NOMVULA MOKONYANE AT THE MEDIA VISIT TO THE VAAL DAM, DENEYSVILLE, FREE STATE 26 FEBRUARY 2017**

Members of the media

The reason for our being here today is as a result of the current drought in the country, juxtaposed against the recent rains that we have just been experiencing.

The last two to three years have been difficult for the country, based on the hydrological drought that has devastated large parts of the countries comprising the Southern African Development Community. The drought has truly not been just a South African experience but has been felt across the region.

Looking at where we come from a few months ago, when the country's dams averaged a lowly 54,8% on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2016, and 49,1% on the 19<sup>th</sup> of December 2016, we averaged 60,5% on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 2017. This rose to 67,1% as of the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, a great deal different from the 54% at the same time last year.

The provincial averages at the moment are as follows (with the previous year's ones in brackets):

- Eastern Cape: 63,4% (73,1%)
- Free State: 74,9% (53,7%)
- Gauteng: 90,2% (83,2%)
- KwaZulu-Natal: 52,8% (52,4%)
- Limpopo: 72,4% (59,3%)
- Mpumalanga: 72% (59,7)
- Northern Cape: 104,7% (56%)
- North West: 86,7% (44.4%)
- Western Cape: 32,8% (49,1%).

The increases in most of the dam levels result from the very significant rains over primarily four days of good rains in this past week, with approximately 386 million cubic meters per day flowing into the river systems.

As we can see most of the provinces have shown on-going increases, with the serious exception being the Western Cape, the western part of the Northern Cape and the Eastern Cape. These areas did not benefit from the recent rains.

It is also vital to note that the country's groundwater levels remain low and they will take a good few years to recover. This in line with our assessments that a full recovery from the drought will be seen in two to three years time.

Coming to the area at which we are today, the Integrated Vaal River System (IVRS), very critical for the economic hub of our country, Gauteng and parts of Mpumalanga, Free State and the North West, has increased to 78,4% as at 25 February, compared favourably to the 59,2% it was at the same time in 2016.

As at the 25<sup>th</sup> of February, the Vaal Dam in particular, increased to 94, 86%; Grootdraai was at 103, 1% and Bloemhof was at 81, 7%.

The current status of the IVRS necessitates a consideration around the lifting of the water restrictions we announced for Gauteng in November 2016 with immediate effect. This will be communicated with the Municipalities and gazetted accordingly.

However, the system review planned for May will still happen to consider the outcomes for the 2017/18 hydrological year and as to whether or not any further decisions on restrictions ought to be implemented.

We have also begun releasing water from the Bloemhof Dam, 250 cubic metres per second on Friday. This rose by another 250 to 500 cubic metres per second on Saturday by 14h00.

The deferred release from the Vaal Dam will be guided by the daily readings from today, Sunday through the days to come.

We continue to request that all those along the Orange and Vaal Rivers be critically aware of the possible rise in the levels of the two rivers with the imminent releases.

Those living below the flood lines, having equipment and/or livestock close to the banks, should take precautions and rather move to higher ground as the released water plus the on-going rains will lead to higher levels in both rivers.

The flood warning protocols have been activated to ensure that we mitigate any damage to properties, eliminating any possible loss of life. The monitoring of the Lower Vaal and Orange Rivers as there is a possible impact of flooding on the town of Douglas and the farming community downstream of the town.

Working hand in hand with the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) we advise the NDMC accordingly so that it then advises the relevant Provincial Structures.

The DWS monitors 211 dams; of these 13 are below 10%, with 33 between 10 – 40%. We have 57 dams above 100%. The status of the different systems around the country is available on the DWS website.

In general the country's drought outlook is looking up. We can see that most dams and systems are showing recovery at different levels. Whilst the Western Cape and parts of the Northern Cape expect upcoming winter rainfall, the situation in KZN is influenced by the insufficient recovery of dams. The example of the Umgeni System at 56,2% is below the 58,5% it was at this time last year. The concern therefore remains.

Let me also take this opportunity to again emphasize the need to harvest rainwater as a means to creating additional water storage for domestic and for industrial purposes.

We have to encourage that a greater emphasis be placed on the operations and maintenance of municipal reticulation infrastructure as well as on water conservation and demand management that must assist water preservation.

Lastly, I must thank the people of Gauteng for their efforts in helping us save water by adhering to the restrictions placed and attempting to use water responsibly and wisely during that last three to four months. I trust the lessons learnt on responsible water use will become a norm and a way of life for us all and that we will adapt to the realities of being a water-scarce country.

Dankie!  
Ngiyabonga!

