**Remarks for Deputy Minister David Mahlobo at the Science-Policy Dialogue: Floods Risk Management: Enhancing Flood Early Warning Systems to Reduce Vulnerability, ON 26 JULY 2022, UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA**

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A very good day to:

Dr Jennifer Molwantwa, the Water Reasearch Commission CEO

Prof Tafadzwa Mabhaudhi from UKZN

Prof Sylvester Mpandeli, the WRC Executive Manager

Dr Inga Jacobs-Mata, from the International Water Management Institute (IWMI)

Prof Stanley Liphadzi,WRC Group Executive: R&D

Dr Joel Botai, from the South African Weather Service

Dr Luxon Nhamo, of the WRC

Dr Brilliant Petja, of the WRC

Dr Giriraj Amarnath, from the IWMI

Ms Futhi Vilakazi, from Umgeni Water

Dr Mohau Mateyisi from the CSIR

Prof Cathy Sutherland from UKZN

Mr Mahlodi Tau from the SANBI

All attendees present,

Members of the media.

**Appointment of Dr Jennifer Balatedi Molwantwa, WRC CEO**

Let me start of by congratulating the WRC on the appointment of its new WRC CEO, Dr Jennifer Balatedi Molwantwa who assumed her new position as of the 1st of April 2022. Based on her calibre, we believe she is well positioned to lead the WRC as it continues to develop informed credible scientific knowledge to inform decision making in the water sector. Over the years, the Commission has made considerable contribution to transforming the South African water research and innovation sector whilst training a young pool of future water researchers and professionals.

**Impact of KZN floods and ongoing Eastern Cape drought**

Ladies and gentlemen, the recent devastating floods experienced in the KwaZulu-Natal Province and the ongoing drought and water scarcity challenges in the Eastern Cape confirm the vulnerability of South Africa to extreme weather events. The April and May floods in KwaZulu-Natal this year resulted in more than 450 lives lost, property damages, and disruptions to national supply chains due to damages at the Durban port. Consequently, the Presidency had to declare a national state of disaster due to the scale of the damage, which had a far-reaching impact - beyond just the economy of KwaZulu-Natal Province. The recurrence, intensity, and frequency of extreme weather events and disasters call for building preparedness and resilience to climate change toward risk reduction and preventing loss of life and damage to infrastructure.

**The 6th Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report paints a bleak picture for Africa and confirms that the region will be a climate change hotspot**

South Africa is not spared from being a climate change hotspot and faces significant climate risks. Climate change is a reality whose impacts are now being felt across all economic sectors, with huge impacts on lives and livelihoods. In most cases, we have been caught unprepared, with some disastrous consequences as a result, and it is the government's call for all stakeholders to take their part and contribute towards reducing risk and vulnerability.

The recent floods in KwaZulu-Natal are a stark reminder of the reality of climate change and the vulnerability of our people to climate change. It also emphasises the urgency of the need to accelerate and increase investments in building climate change resilience and adaptation,

especially at local levels where the impacts of these disasters are mostly felt. The question is: *"How do we build preparedness for the new normal?"*

## Advisory Panel on Climate Change

An advisory panel was established for the provision of a regular bulletin which talks to the water situation in the country, while providing outlook and advice. The primary purpose of the panel is to convene a climate and weather summit regularly, which will discuss amongst others, weather and climate risks at hand and issue for the water sector a bulletin which will provide an outlook and advice to inform planning, risk reduction and adaptive response. Different experts are drawn from a variety of institutions across South Africa, and together, constitute a community of practice. Climate plays a significant role to the country's economic development. It is strongly believed that regular communication of weather and climate issues will improve government and various development sectors' decision making for climate change response, risk reduction and resilient approach for tackling the challenges to sustain economic growth. The focus is largely on climate resilient developmental response, over and above management of risks brought by the changing climate.

## Early warning systems for South Africa

The challenge requires all stakeholders to put their heads together for immediate adoption, implementation, and operationalisation of existing early warning systems to reduce vulnerability and risk. Both science and policy should be seen taking the leading role and working together with other stakeholders. The Water Research Commission and its partners, the South African Weather Service, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and the International Water Management Institute recognise adapting to climate change and building resilience at local levels as important to securing South Africa's future. The outcomes of this science-policy dialogue should inform policy and decision-making toward building preparedness for climate change resilient communities.

## Preparing for extreme weather events (floods and droughts)

The WRC Climate Change/Variability Lighthouse is undertaken through collaborative research on priority water-related climate issues with partnerships forged along the innovation value chain.

Key issues of concern include extreme climate events (floods, droughts, landslides, heatwaves, wildfires, etc.), water quality and health, coastal zone management, water supply, groundwater recharge and the energy–water nexus. The Lighthouse now incorporates the programme that was associated with water scarcity. The role of this Lighthouse in climate-change response is embedded within adaptive capacity, resilience, improvement of early warning systems, reduced vulnerability and an improved ability to respond, coupled with proactive planning. The main aim is to enhance the country's water security and resilience to current and future water scarcity - South Africa is a water scarce country and with the effects of climate change, we need to ensure that we safeguard this resource whilst ensuring resilience.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I wish you well in your engagements and I thank you for your time.