



**SPEAKING NOTES FOR MINISTER SENZO MCHUNU AT THE WORLD WATER DAY
MEDIA BRIEFING ON TUESDAY, 22 MARCH 2022, GCIS**

1. SALUTATIONS AND INTRODUCTION

I would like to acknowledge the presence of:

Dr Sean Phillips, the Director-General of the Department,

Senior Managers in the Department,

Members of the media, those present here today and those on virtual platforms –

And all those South Africans watching,

A very good morning to you all!

Almost 30 years ago, the **United Nations Conference on Environment and Development**, also known as the **“Earth Summit”** took place in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil from 3 to 14 June 1992. The *Earth Summit* produced a **broad agenda and a new blueprint for international action on environmental and development issues that would help guide international co-operation and development policy in the twenty-first century**. It is at this Summit that **22 March each year from 1993, was declared “World Water Day”**. The aim was to **bring the water agenda to the fore and remind governments across the globe of their responsibility** to ensure that everyone has access to clean water.

Yesterday in South Africa, we commemorated Human Rights Day, a day when the country reflects on the strides it has made and its shortcomings in as far as delivering services to the people is concerned. **Water is a fundamental human right, water is life, water is a necessity, and it is a must have for everyone! As government, we have a responsibility to make this a reality for everyone.**

This gathering coincides with the 9th World Water Forum that is currently taking place, in Dakar, Senegal, under the theme: *"Water Security for Peace and Development"*. As a country, we are well represented in that important forum by a strong team from the DWS.

2. THEME

This year, the World Water Day is celebrated under the theme: *"Making the invisible visible"*. This year's topic refers to a very important subject on water resources management which is **Groundwater**. Groundwater is invisible, but its impact is visible everywhere. Ground water is out of sight, under our feet and it is a hidden treasure that enriches our lives. **As climate change gets worse, groundwater will become more and more critical. As a Department and as a country, we are committed to exploring ground water as an alternative water source to ensure water security in communities affected by water supply challenges in our country.**

3. ESSENTIAL USE OF GROUNDWATER

South Africa is a water scarce country, ranking a the 30th driest country in the world and we receive summer rainfall (November to March) with exception of Western Cape and parts of Eastern and Northern Cape (May to August) that receive winter rain fall. **Since the surface water resources are fully allocated, our water supply needs are supplemented by international transfers from the Lesotho Highland Water Transfer Scheme. In order to meet the increase in water demand, we have gradually increased groundwater use** through the groundwater development scheme. There is an increasing trend for individual community members to drill boreholes for self-supply in response to water supply challenges. **The rapid rate at which this is happening shows how resilient and critical the groundwater resource is.**

Groundwater plays an important role in ensuring there is water security in South Africa including **contributing approximately 13% of the national total water supply in addition to providing up to 100% of water supply to some areas.** It is thus a resource of strategic importance. Climate change and increased demand for water across multiple sectors have already impacted surface water storage throughout Southern Africa. Studies predict that by 2025, the region will have insufficient water supplies to meet human and ecosystem needs, resulting in

increased competition for scarce resources, constrained economic development, and declining human health.

The Water Research Commission (WRC) provides groundwater research and knowledge to the country by translating needs into research ideas, transferring research results, and disseminating knowledge. Over the years, the WRC has continued to strive to become a global knowledge and South Africa's premier knowledge hub across the innovation value chain. **In addition, the WRC has developed knowledge in this field together with the Council for Geological Science (CGS), Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR), Witwatersrand (WITS) University, Stellenbosch University, DWS laboratories, and others.**

A major challenge that needs to be addressed is the translation of science into policy - and thus to make the technical outputs of the project have an impact at both national and regional level. **Developing resilient agricultural livelihoods and sustainable management of water resources are vital to achieving most of the development goals as outlined in the United Nations' 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Africa Agenda 2063.** Today, however, **groundwater is acknowledged as a national asset** and an integral part of South Africa's water resources. **Groundwater has played a major role in reducing the backlog for domestic water supply.**

As a Department, **we have acknowledged that our country's water resources are on the decline in both quality and quantity.** We are not the only country facing the water quality challenges. **The World Economic Forum Global Risks Report of 2019 reports that water and environmental concerns are more prevalent than ever.**

4. WATER POLLUTION AND EFFORTS TO CURB SAME

The **Water Quality Management Policies and Strategies for South Africa (2017), identifies pollution from wastewater treatment plants and mine operations as main sources of pollution.** Policies and standards to deal with pollution in these sectors are **generally in place** and the **challenges facing the country are not due to policy gap, but rather non-compliance to existing policies and standards.**

The **Department is fast-tracking the activities of the Anti-Pollution Task Team** to deal with all water quality pollution problems in the country. The **objectives of the Task Team** are to **co-ordinate and integrate efforts for the management of water resources quality in South Africa. It will provide high level guidance to ensure protection of water resources and identify remedies to mitigate pollution impacts.** Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement is one of the key tasks of the Anti-Pollution Task Team.

The **main source of pollution** comes from **domestic wastewater treatment, which includes the leaking or malfunctioning of wastewater collection systems designed to transport wastewater to our WasteWater Treatment Works (WWTWs) as well as the works themselves, and from mining operations.** Currently, there are 1013 municipal WWTW in the country and of these, 544 (54%) have authorisations in place with 23% (236) that are unauthorised or operate under expired authorisations. The department is progressing with verification of the authorisation status of a further 141 works, the remaining 14%.

Since 2014, the Department has investigated a total of five hundred and ninety-eight (598) cases related to WWTWs which were **mainly** as a result of **complaints received from the public. Enforcement actions were taken by DWS against those municipalities** which were found to have violated the water legislation in relation to WWTW; **enforcement actions taken include administrative, civil and criminal actions.**

5. IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND CO-OPERATION

Ladies and gentlemen, members of the media, as we gather here today, **we must not forget that during the past two years, COVID-19 tested the strength of our water and sanitation service delivery models in a great way. COVID-19 has not only affected the physical health of our country, but it has exposed the big challenges we are facing as a nation in the form of inequality, economic vulnerability, the lack of access to water services and poor maintenance of our water infrastructure.**

It also taught us the importance of co-operation between the public and private sector, especially during challenging and uncertain times. We **all witnessed how the private sector and civil society joined hands with the public sector to ensure the safety and well-being of all members of society, including access to water for the unserved communities.**

This is the **social compact we need to strengthen as per the call of the President of the Republic. We have commenced with partnering with the private sector, with the Northern Cape being our pilot province.**

6. NATIONAL WATER AND SANITATION SUMMIT OUTCOMES

We **successfully held our National Water and Sanitation Summit** in February this year where we covered **8 themes**, namely:

1. Water Resource Management and Climate Change
2. Financial Sustainability of the Water & Sanitation Sector
3. Water Shortages – Delivery Mechanisms by Municipalities and Water Boards
4. Integrated Sanitation Plan
5. Water and Sanitation Infrastructure
6. Managing Pollution and Water Quality
7. Transboundary and International Water Partnerships
8. Legislative Framework

Discussions were held under these themes, with timelines being agreed to, wherein all identified stakeholders would work jointly to achieve the resolutions of the various Commissions. We are working on mechanisms to implement the proposed actions. Overall, we are focusing on increasing water supply to households and businesses.

7. CONCLUSION

As we work towards the achievement of targets set out in the NDP vision for 2030 and the SDG's 2030 of affordable and reliable access to sufficient and safe water and hygienic sanitation for socio economic growth and wellbeing, with due regard to the environment, we remain resolute as a Department and we want South Africa to know that we are hard at work!

Thank you for your time.