



**MINISTRY
WATER AND SANITATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Briefing statement by Minister of Water and Sanitation, Hon. Pemmy Majodina to members of the media on 05 August 2024

Deputy Ministers, David Mahlobo and Sello Seitholo,
Director-General of the Department, Dr Sean Phillips,
Senior Officials from the Department present here today,
Members of the media here and those connected via virtual platforms,
All members of the public,

Thank you for honoring our invite to this Media Briefing.

Introduction

We are holding this Media Briefing during a very significant month of our democracy, Women's Month, which seeks to recognise women of this country for their contributions towards the freedom and democracy we enjoy today.

This year, as we celebrate 30 years of freedom and democracy, the month also serves as an opportunity for the water sector to also reflect on how women in particular are affected by a lack of access to clean water and safe sanitation, as they normally bear the brunt of the burden of fetching water from afar when they do not have access to clean running water.

In addition, there is an ongoing need to ensure that women are equitably represented in the sector and have access to opportunities that are available in the sector. As a sector, we will ensure women's emancipation

remains one of our key focus areas, in line with government's constitutional responsibility and national priority to protect, promote and advance the rights of women in all areas of the economy.

Responsibilities of national government and municipalities with regard to water and sanitation

The Constitution, National Water Act and the Water Services Act clearly define roles and responsibilities for the management of water resources and for providing water services in our country. The Department of Water and Sanitation is responsible for:

- Water resource management and taking regulatory action to protect our water resources
- Setting national minimum norms and standards for water services provided by municipalities
- Providing support to municipalities and intervening where these norms and standards are not being met.

The Water Boards are entities under the Minister of Water and Sanitation that are established in terms of the Water Services Act to assist municipalities with bulk potable water infrastructure and services.

The provision of local water and sanitation services is the Constitutional and legal responsibility of municipalities.

First month of office

Since being sworn in on 3 July, we have been inundated with calls and messages from the public and local and provincial political leaders regarding challenges with water and sanitation service delivery at local level. These challenges have included a lack of access to water, sewage pollution, and disruptions in water supply for various reasons.

What has struck us about many of these calls is that the callers do not seem to appreciate that the provision of water services is the responsibility of municipalities, not the national Department of Water and Sanitation.

It will be a priority for us to correct this misunderstanding and to encourage communities and community leaders to hold their municipalities

accountable for the delivery of water and sanitation services. We will undertake community outreach programmes to educate communities to understand these roles and responsibilities.

Notwithstanding that this is the responsibility of municipalities, we have a call centre to receive complaints and queries about all aspects of water and sanitation in the country. The call centre number is 0800 200 200.

When we receive calls related to the responsibilities of the national department or the water boards, we ensure that these issues are dealt with.

The first point of call for residents to raise issues regarding municipal water and sanitation services must be their municipalities. However, when we receive calls related to water and sanitation services which are the responsibility of municipalities, we refer these to the relevant municipalities to resolve.

Again, it is important to note that it is only the municipalities which can resolve these issues - the national Department cannot do maintenance or repairs to municipal infrastructure on behalf of a municipality.

During our first 30 days we have also had the opportunity to present the Department of Water and Sanitation Budget Vote Policy Statement for the 2024/2025 financial year to Parliament, followed by a series of appearances before various parliamentary committees.

In addition, we have also met and had robust engagements with our seven water boards on their plans, the projects they are undertaking, and the challenges they face in their effort to provide potable bulk water services to their customers, who are municipalities and industries within their areas of service.

Key challenges in the water and sanitation sector

The water sector is facing many challenges, and many of our citizens are suffering from not having access to clean water or to safe and dignified sanitation, and from frequent water supply disruptions and sewage spillages.

Raw water supply

South Africa is one of the thirty most water-scarce countries in the world, yet our average consumption of water is 218 litres per capita per day, compared to the international average of 173 litres per capita per day. We have already captured 75% of the available surface water in dams, and the remaining opportunities for capturing surface water are expensive. At the same time, the demand for water in South Africa is increasing, as a result of population growth and economic growth.

Lack of access to water and sanitation services

The average national access to at least an RDP level of water service has increased from approximately 60% in 1994 to approximately 90% currently. This is a major achievement.

However, it does not mean that 90% of all communities in all areas have access to water. Some communities have 100% access, while some have 0% access. Communities are often forced to obtain water from sources which are polluted, and which sometimes contain dangerous animals.

Deteriorating municipal water and sanitation services

The Blue, Green and No Drop reports issued by the department in December 2023 indicated that the quality and reliability of municipal water and sanitation services have deteriorated markedly over the last ten years.

For example, the Blue Drop report found that the percentage of water supply systems with poor or bad microbiological water quality compliance (i.e., water that is not safe to drink) increased from 5% in 2014 to 46% in 2023, resulting in increased risk of water-borne diseases.

The 2022 Green Drop Report found that 40% of waste water treatment systems were in a critical state of performance, compared to 30% in 2013. It also found that 90 of the 144 water services authorities had at least one critical wastewater system.

Dysfunctional municipal wastewater systems are resulting in pollution of communities, rivers, and the environment, resulting in intolerable living conditions and increased risk of life-threatening diseases such as cholera. It is also resulting in damage to tourism and services industries.

The No Drop report found that the national average for municipal non-revenue water increased from 37% in 2014 to 47% in 2023. The implications of this include:

- a) that money spent to develop dams and water treatment works is wasted if a large portion of the water is thrown away through leaks in municipal water distribution systems; and
- b) that municipalities with high non-revenue water are unable to pay water boards for treated water supplied by them and cannot afford to properly maintain and operate their water distribution infrastructure.

The main causes of high non-revenue water include:

- a) high physical losses of water due to leaks in municipal distribution systems, which in turn are caused by ageing infrastructure and neglect of maintenance by municipalities;
- b) illegal connections; and
- c) weak municipal billing and revenue collection systems.

Financial sustainability

Apart from the grants which the national government provides to municipalities to address water and sanitation infrastructure backlogs and to provide free basic water to the indigent, the water sector has to be self-financing through revenues from the sale of water.

However, by May 2024, the debts owed by municipalities to water boards had reached R21.3 billion. The water boards do not receive money from the fiscus and this debt is threatening their ongoing financial viability, as well as the financial viability of the whole sector.

Addressing the challenges

Ensuring water security

To ensure that the availability of water does not become a constraint to investment and economic growth, and to ensure that there is sufficient water to meet the needs of our population as mandated by the Constitution, we will be focusing on three key priorities over the term of this government.

Firstly, we will ensure that there is timeous investment in additional national water resource infrastructure.

Secondly, we will focus on diversifying the water mix, and increasingly make more use of other sources of water, including the sustainable use of groundwater, water re-use, and seawater desalination.

Thirdly, we will implement more effective water conservation and demand management programmes to bring our water consumption per capita levels in line with, or below, the international average, and to ensure that industries use water as sparingly as possible.

Developing national water resource infrastructure

Since 1994, the Department of Water and Sanitation has built 18 new dams. These include the Qedusizi, Bivane, Braamhoek, and Spring Grove dams in KZN; the De Bos, Ceres Koekedouw and Berg Rivier dams in the Western Cape; the Boschmanskop, Driekoppies, Injaka, and Kettingspruit dams in Mpumalanga; Setumo Dam in North West; Bedford Dam in Free State; Nandoni and de Hoop dams in Limpopo; Katse and Mohale Dams (jointly with the Lesotho government) in Lesotho; and Maguga Dam in eSwatini (jointly with the eSwatini government).

In addition to these projects, there are currently 15 other major national water resource infrastructure projects to a value of more than R100 billion in different stages of implementation around the country. Some of these projects involve raising the walls of existing dams, and others involve the construction of new dams.

Many of these projects were delayed for a long period of time, but they have now all been unblocked, and it will be a priority for us to ensure that they are all implemented expeditiously. The projects are:

- in 2023 the Department completed a R865 million project to raise the wall of the Hazelmere Dam to increase water supply to the

eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality and surrounding areas in KwaZulu-Natal

- the new R26 billion uMkhomazi Dam to provide urgently needed additional water to eThekweni and surrounding areas in KwaZulu Natal
- the new Polihali Dam, as part of the R42 billion second phase of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project to provide urgently needed additional water to Gauteng and parts of the Free State, Mpumalanga, North West, and Northern Cape provinces
- the new R8 billion Ntabelanga Dam on a tributary of the uMzimvubu River to provide additional water for irrigation and domestic use in the eastern region of the Eastern Cape
- the R4 billion new water transfer pipeline from the Crocodile West River to the Lephalale area of Limpopo to augment water supply to the recently completed Medupi Power Station, Lephalale Town and the existing Matimba Power station
- the new R1.8 billion Cwabeni off-channel storage dam to provide additional water to Port Shepstone and surrounding areas in KwaZulu Natal
- the R1.2 billion project to abstract water from the Berg River and convey it to the existing Voëlvllei Dam, to increase the supply of water to the City of Cape Town and surrounding areas
- the new R4 billion N'wamitwa Dam on the Great Letaba River, to provide additional water for irrigation, to increase flows into the Kruger National Park, and to provide additional water for domestic and industrial use in the eastern part of Limpopo
- the new R2 billion Foxwood Dam to provide additional water for irrigation and for the town of Adelaide in the Eastern Cape
- the new R1 billion Zalu Dam to provide additional water for the town of Lusikisiki and surrounding villages in the Eastern Cape
- the new R800 million Stephen Dlamini Dam to provide sustainable water supplies to the town of Bulwer and surrounding peri-urban and rural communities in KwaZulu Natal
- the R7 billion project to raise the wall of the existing Clanwilliam Dam to triple the amount of water that the dam can store, to provide additional water for irrigation, domestic and industrial use in Clanwilliam and surrounding areas in the Western Cape

- the R750 million project to raise the wall of the existing Tzaneen Dam to address water shortages in Tzaneen and surrounding areas in Limpopo
- the R500 million project to raise the wall of the existing Klipfontein Dam to provide additional water for domestic use and irrigation in Northern KwaZulu Natal
- the new R600 million Coerney Balancing Dam to improve water security for the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan area.

Most of these projects are financed off-budget, through raising money in the financial markets. To enable us to increase such fund-raising, the previous Parliament passed the National Water Resource Infrastructure Agency (NWRIA) Bill, which is now awaiting the signature of the President. Establishment of the NWRIA will be one of priorities over the coming year.

To improve the management of our water catchments to ensure water security, we will be finalising the remaining board appointments for the six Catchment Management Agencies and assisting them to become fully established and functional.

Increasing access to water and sanitation services

As indicated previously, it is the Constitutional responsibility of municipalities to ensure access to reliable clean drinking water and safe and dignified sanitation.

To assist municipalities to implement this responsibility, national government provides municipalities with grants to address backlogs in access, most of which were inherited from apartheid. These grants include the Municipal Infrastructure Grant which is allocated to municipalities by COGTA, the Human Settlements Development Grant which is allocated to metropolitan municipalities by DHS, and the Regional Bulk Infrastructure (RBIG) Grant and Water Services Infrastructure Grant (WSIG) which are allocated to non-metropolitan municipalities by DWS.

In this term it will be a priority for us to continue to work with municipalities to ensure that they prioritise projects to increase access using their RBIG and WSIG allocations.

For example, the main bulk pipeline to supply raw water from Nandoni Dam to Nsami Dam near Giyani was completed last year. This has enabled sufficient water to be supplied to the Mopani District Municipality to enable it to provide access to piped clean drinking water to its residents who currently do not have access.

The Department has now allocated RBIG and WSIG funds to the District Municipality to enable it to upgrade the Giyani Water Treatment Works and to install bulk pipelines and reticulation pipelines, bulk reservoirs, service reservoirs and reticulation to households. Water has started to flow to households in 9 villages in Giyani and we will strive to ensure a further 15 villages receive water by the end of this year, and that a further 31 villages receive water within the next two years.

The uMngeni-uThukela Water Board in KZN is assisting a number of districts to implement various water supply schemes to increase access to piped clean drinking water for local communities. This includes the R9.5 billion Mandlakazi Bulk Water Supply Scheme under Zululand District Municipality and uMkhanyakude District Municipality (including the Jozini, Big 5 Hlabisa, uMhlabuyalingana and Mtubatuba Local Municipalities). The work involves the construction of infrastructure to abstract water from Jozini Dam and supply it to neighbouring communities.

In Mpumalanga, DWS is implementing the R1.7 billion Loskop Regional Bulk Water Supply project, which involves the construction of a bulk pipeline from Loskop Dam to Thembisile Hani Local Municipality for domestic water supply. The cross-boundary bulk pipeline will also supply water to previously unserved communities in the Moutse-East area under the Sekhukhune District Municipality in Limpopo.

The Department is also supporting the Mnquma Municipality in the Eastern Cape to provide water to unserved communities, through the R370 million Nqamakhwe Regional Bulk Water Scheme.

In partnership with the mining sector, DWS is implementing the R27 billion Olifants River Water Resource Development Project in Limpopo. The project will result in water being provided to the mines to enable mining expansion. It will also result in water being provided to previously

unserved communities adjacent to the bulk pipelines being built in the Sekhukhune and Mokgalakwena municipalities.

Similarly in the Northern Cape, DWS is implementing the R10 billion Vaal Gamagara Phase Two Project in partnership with the mines, to provide additional water for mining and to provide water to previously unserved communities along the bulk pipeline.

Supporting municipalities to improve municipal water and sanitation services

We would like to emphasise that we will continue to carry out the Drop assessments every two years, because they play an essential role in providing citizens with information about the state of their water and sanitation services, as well as providing municipalities with detailed information about the causes of poor services and what needs to be done to address them.

Along with COGTA, National Treasury and DHS, DWS will continue to support municipalities to improve their water and sanitation services in several ways. It will assist municipalities to improve their water services planning through the development of Five-Year Water and Sanitation Reliability Plans, Water and Sanitation Master Plans, and Water Services Development Plans.

One of our immediate priorities will be to visit all the provinces to meet with Water Services Authorities, to review progress with existing improvement plans which are supported by the department, and to assist the municipalities to develop additional improvement plans where necessary. As well as using the RBIG and WSIG grants to assist municipalities to address backlogs in access, DWS will continue to allocate these grants to municipalities to assist them to improve the reliability and capacity of their existing infrastructure.

eThekwini and Gauteng water supply disruptions

One of the main underlying causes of the increasing water supply disruptions that have been experienced in eThekwini and Gauteng is a shortage of raw water in both areas, which DWS is addressing through

the construction of the new Polihali Dam in Lesotho and the uMkhomazi Water Project in KZN.

In the meantime, we will continue to work closely with eThekweni and the municipalities in Gauteng to encourage them to improve the maintenance and performance of their municipal water distribution infrastructure, such as by building additional reservoirs and pumping stations to improve the resilience of their systems, and by reducing leaks.

To reduce the risk of water supply disruptions until the new dams are built, we will also be supporting eThekweni and the Gauteng municipalities to reduce demand through implementing large-scale awareness campaigns to use water sparingly.

Hammanskraal water supply

We will continue to support the City of Tshwane to address the lack of piped clean drinking water in Hammanskraal. This support has resulted in the City being able to make progress with the repair and upgrading of the Rooiwal Wastewater Treatment Works to address the sewage pollution in the Apies River and to enable the Temba Water Treatment Works to become functional again.

In the meantime, by October this year, Magalies Water will complete the construction of phase one of a 'package plant' to enable an alternative source of piped clean drinking water to start to be provided to Hammanskraal.

Emfuleni sewage pollution

In Emfuleni Local Municipality, we will continue with the Section 63 (of the Water Services Act) Intervention through Rand Water to address sewerage pollution in the Vaal. Good progress has been made in refurbishing and repairing sewage pump stations, unblocking sewer lines, repairing collapsed sewer lines, as well as repairing and refurbishing waste water treatment works. This has substantially reduced sewage pollution in residential areas in Emfuleni.

The main remaining work is to upgrade the capacity of the major wastewater treatment works in the area, and these projects are currently in the procurement phase.

During this financial year, we will also be supporting Rand Water and Emfuleni Local Municipality to implement a decision by the Council of the Emfuleni Municipality to establish a special purpose vehicle (SPV) to be the Water Service Provider in the municipality in future. It is envisaged that this SPV will have the capability to provide water and sanitation services that meet national minimum norms and standards.

Improving water services in rural municipalities

DWS is also providing support for the planning, funding, implementation, and monitoring of municipal water and sanitation projects in a number of rural provinces, including:

- R1.4 billion for Ugu, uMkhanyakude and uThukela District Municipalities in KZN;
- R18 billion for the Olifants Ebenezer programme, aimed at bringing additional water to Polokwane, Seshego and surrounding areas;
- R13 billion over the next seven years for projects in North West, through the Bulela Metsi initiative;
- R350 million in Lekwa Municipality in Mpumalanga;
- R650 million for the Lower Sundays River, Greater Mbizana, and Ndlambe water schemes in the Eastern Cape
- R5.4 billion over the next five years for Maluti-A-Phofung, Matjhabeng, and Ngwathe local municipalities.

The Department will prioritise the completion of the delayed remaining Bucket Eradication Programme projects in the Northern Cape and Free State. Of 33 projects which formed part of the programme in the Free State, 26 are completed (eradicating approximately 32 000 buckets). Approximately ten thousand buckets remain to be eradicated in the seven incomplete projects. Of 30 projects which formed part of the programme in the Northern Cape, 29 are completed (eradicating approximately 12 000 buckets) and 596 buckets remain to be eradicated in the one incomplete project.

However, the programme will not result in the eradication of the undignified and repugnant bucket system altogether from the South African landscape. This is because the programme only focuses on eradicating buckets in certain towns in certain provinces where they were identified in 2012. Since then, and on an ongoing basis, other municipalities elsewhere have introduced buckets systems in formal and informal settlements. The eradication of buckets is therefore a moving target.

In order to address this, Cabinet has recently approved a National Sanitation Framework which will provide the basis for the Department to issue new national minimum norms and standards for sanitation which will prohibit the use of the bucket system in both formal and informal settlements.

Working together with the Water Research Commission, the Department is developing new safe, dignified, on-site and non-sewered sanitation systems. These solutions will use much less water than water-borne sewerage sanitation systems, which is necessary in a water scarce country such as South Africa. Such systems will need to be implemented by municipalities.

Strengthening partnerships in the water sector

In line with the President Cyril Ramaphosa's call to strengthen collaboration and social compacts with the private sector, labour, civil society and government, the Ministry of Water and Sanitation will continue to collaborate with all sectors, especially the private sector, to contribute to resolving our country's water and sanitation challenges.

Operation Vulindlela remains a critical intervention to remove all barriers to economic growth and investment. In this regard, we have managed to remove most of the delays in water use licensing.

In addition to partnerships with mining houses for water supply projects, DWS is also facilitating partnerships between the private sector and municipalities, through its Water Partnerships Office, which we established in collaboration with the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) and the South African Local Government Association (SALGA).

This includes finalising plans with the eThekweni, Mangaung, Buffalo City, Nelson Mandela Bay and Tshwane municipalities to mobilise private sector finance for the replacement of leaking municipal water distribution pipes which are resulting in high levels of non-revenue water.

Reform of municipal water and sanitation services

One of our immediate priorities will be to work with our colleagues in Cabinet, particularly the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, to find a solution to the problem of the financial sustainability of the water sector.

Despite the high level of support that we are providing to municipalities, in general municipal water and sanitation services continue to decline. To address this, we will shortly be presenting the Water Services Amendment Bill to Cabinet for approval for it to be submitted to Parliament.

The Amendment Bill provides for the introduction of an operating license system for Water Services Providers, to enable Water Services Authorities to ensure that their Water Services Providers have a minimum level of capability to provide water and sanitation services that meet national norms and standards.

The amendments propose that this should be done through the introduction of an operating license requirement for Water Services Providers, to ensure that they have a minimum level of competency.

The Bill also introduces measures to enable the national department to take regulatory action against municipalities which do not comply with national minimum norms and standards for water services.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to make it clear that it is my intention to ensure that there is continuity of the various reforms that are aimed at addressing the challenges faced by the water sector.

I thank you!

