



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

**SPEECH BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION,
MR DAVID MAHLOBO, ON THE OCCASION OF THE RELEASE OF
THE JAGERSFONTEIN DAM DISASTER REPORT**

28 November 2025

Programme Director;

All Ministers present;

Premier of the Free State, Ms Maqueen Letsoha-Mathae;

MEC for Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Mr Saki Mokoena;

The leadership of Xhariep District Municipality and Kopanong Local Municipality;

Members of the Jagersfontein community;

Families who lost loved ones;

Survivors, stakeholders;

Representatives from sister departments;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen

Minister of Water and Sanitation, Ms Pemmy Majodina, has requested me to release this report on her behalf and the government of South Africa led by President Ramaphosa.

We gather here today with heavy hearts, even three years after a tragedy struck this community. The disaster of 11 September 2022, when the tailings dam owned by Jagersfontein Development (Pty) Ltd collapsed, left a profound scar on the land and on the soul of this community.

That morning, approximately 5.9 million cubic meters of tailings burst through the southern wall of the fine tailings storage facility. The flood swept through homes, farms, roads and public infrastructure. It destroyed over 170 houses, ravaged agricultural land, killed livestock, and severely damaged watercourses, power lines, substations and wastewater facilities. Most painful of all, two of our fellow citizens lost their lives, and one person remains missing and is presumed dead. To their families, I want to say again: We honour your loved ones. We mourn with you. And we will never forget.

Before I proceed, let me begin with an honest and heartfelt acknowledgement: The release of this report has taken too long. You have waited with patience, frustration and, at times, deep pain for the answers you deserve. For this delay, and for the emotional burden it placed on families and residents, I offer my sincere apology.

The delay was not intentional. After the investigation was completed, the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) in the Free State advised that the report could not be released publicly until the first court appearance of those accused in the criminal case. We respected that instruction to safeguard the integrity of the legal process. But I acknowledge that, for the community, the wait felt endless. Today, that wait ends.

Let me share with you how the investigation process unfolded. Following two unsuccessful attempts to appoint service providers, the Department of Water and Sanitation approached the University of Pretoria (UP) and the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits). These esteemed institutions had already begun preliminary research into the disaster. They were formally appointed on 10 October 2023 to conduct an independent technical investigation. The study took nine months and the final report was submitted on 9 September 2024.

This investigation was technical in nature. It did not seek to determine *who* is to blame, but *why, when and where* the tailings facility failed.

The report paints a painful yet necessary picture:

- Construction of the tailings facility began in 2010, and the section that ultimately failed - compartment 2 - was raised from 2014 onwards.
- Evidence shows that as early as February 2019, the owners were aware of instability along the southern wall, more than 3½ years before the collapse.
- The company added large volumes of material in attempts to stabilise the wall, but these efforts were ineffective. Despite the signs of instability, the dam wall continued to be raised and more tailings deposited.
- The construction was based on conceptual designs, not detailed engineering designs required for safe operation.
- A section of the wall was built on a weak foundation, a pre-existing low-strength tailings dump, which contributed significantly to the failure.
- There is no evidence of construction supervision by a registered engineering professional.
- On the morning of 11 September 2022, the inner slope of the wall failed inward, triggering slumping of the crest and overtopping.
- No adequate measures were taken to stop movement at the toe of the dam.
- Critically, the dam had no decant system to safely drain water.

This was a catastrophe that could and should have been prevented. The report was presented to Cabinet on 15 October 2025. Cabinet has resolved that:

- A Technical Task Team, comprising DWS and the Department of Minerals and Petroleum Resources, must investigate legislative gaps in the regulation of tailings storage facilities and make recommendations.

- The Task Team must map all tailings facilities across the country to strengthen oversight by DWS, DMPR and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment.

This is not merely an administrative exercise. It is a commitment to ensure that no community in South Africa ever endures what Jagersfontein went through. Let me be absolutely clear: Those responsible, whether through negligence, misconduct or failure to comply with safety standards, will be held fully accountable. This report strengthens the legal processes already under way. Accountability is not optional. It is a duty we owe to the victims, survivors and the people of South Africa.

To the Community of Jagersfontein: Your resilience has humbled the nation. You stood together through trauma, displacement and uncertainty. You helped one another rebuild, even when your own futures seemed unclear.

Today, I want to say: You are not alone. Government remains with you, not for one day, but for as long as the rebuilding process requires. The road to full recovery demands unity, not as a slogan, but as a shared commitment.

We need government at all levels, the mining sector, engineers, environmental specialists and planners, civil society, community leadership and all partners in development to work together, with urgency and discipline.

Let us make Jagersfontein a symbol, not of tragedy, but of renewal, justice and collective resolve.

Today we close a chapter of uncertainty. But we open a new chapter of action, accountability and healing. We honour those who lost their lives. We stand with those who lost everything. We recommit ourselves to rebuilding lives, livelihoods and trust.

Today we say with conviction:

“Never again will the lives of communities be compromised by negligence or weak oversight. Never again will warning signs be ignored. Never again will profit be placed above people”.

Let us walk this road together, firm, united and hopeful.

I thank you