



**DEPUTY MINISTER
WATER AND SANITATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**SPEECH BY DEPUTY MINISTER SELLO SEITLHOLO ON BUDGET VOTE 41:
WATER AND SANITATION, NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES, CAPE TOWN,
10 JULY 2025**

Honourable House Chairperson;

Honourable Minister Pemmy Majodina;

Honourable Deputy Minister Mahlobo;

Chairperson of the Select Committee – Mr Kaunda;

Honourable Members of Parliament;

Director-General and Senior Managers of the Department of Water and Sanitation;

Leadership of our Entities: Chairpersons, Members of the Boards, CEOs, and Senior Executives;

Leadership of various stakeholders in the sector and civil society;

Fellow South Africans;

As we gather today, we confront a fundamental truth: we cannot hope to build a better South Africa without first revitalizing our municipalities. From the roads we drive on, to the water we depend on.

Our local governments form the backbone of our communities. If we neglect them, we neglect the very foundation of our nation.

The challenges we face in the water sector are deeply intertwined with municipal health. The alarming levels of non-revenue water—water produced but never billed—alongside the absence of a legal obligation for municipalities to reinvest their water sales revenue, have left many struggling to pay their debts to our water boards. As of February 2025, municipalities owed a staggering R24 billion to the water boards,

including interest on long-outstanding debts. This situation poses a grave risk to the financial sustainability of our entire water value chain, demanding our immediate attention and collective action.

In response to this crisis, the Minister outlined a plan last year to strengthen our debt collection processes. We've taken decisive steps, to work collaboratively with our Cabinet colleagues, particularly the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, to find sustainable solutions.

National Treasury has agreed to withhold equitable shares from municipalities that refuse to settle their debts, a necessary measure to protect our vital water resources. The collapse of our water sector would have far-reaching consequences for our national security and economy.

Clean water is not a luxury; it is a fundamental human right essential for our health and well-being. And so, we are committed to safeguarding the stability and viability of this essential service.

Honourable chairperson, we have since seen the positive impact that the withholding equitable shares from 12 municipalities has had on the finances of our water boards. Additionally, we have secured a debt write-off mechanism to address long-outstanding debts effectively. This Honourable Chairperson is one of the ways in which we are supporting municipalities.

My mandate within the Department is to oversee regulation and compliance regarding the management and pollution of our water resources. As a result, I have had to travel across the country for an in-depth view of the status of pollution, to date I have visited eight provinces and over 30 municipalities, witnessing firsthand the state of water pollution in our country.

What I have seen is nothing short of a **CRISIS**.

Water pollution is a silent epidemic, a massive iceberg lurking below the surface, threatening to plunge us into disaster if we do not change our course. It increases the risk of waterborne diseases and drives up the cost of treating water for safe consumption.

This crisis jeopardises food security and undermines our tourism industry, impacting the livelihoods of countless South Africans. We cannot ignore the reality that pollution has diminished the economic potential of many of our dams. The Hartebeespoort Dam, once a vibrant hub, now suffers from pollution that deters visitors. Similarly, reports came out yesterday of the closure of Kings beach in Gqeberha, because of pollution, severely harming the local tourism, stifling economic growth and job creation, especially during the current holiday season.

We must act together to confront this crisis.

Despite these challenges, the Department has made commendable strides in addressing water pollution. We launched key initiatives, such as the Vaal River Anti-Pollution Forum, which has brought together stakeholders from various sectors to collaborate on improving the health of this vital river system. The forum promotes accountability and effective management, enabling us to tackle pollution more efficiently.

Our regulatory focus also includes preventing pollution of our water resources. Our systems face various pollution threats, from urban litter to agricultural runoff and unlawful discharges from industries. The pollution of our water resources threatens not only lives but also livelihoods, hampering our efforts to grow the economy and create jobs.

To address pollution from mining operations, we will publish our reviewed draft mine water regulations or better known as GN704 for public comment. Non-compliance could lead to administrative and punitive measures against mining polluters under the National Water Act.

Additionally, we have made significant progress in restoring and rehabilitating polluted water bodies, resulting in improved water quality in several affected areas. However, these improvements are a drop in the ocean considering just how many of our water resources are currently overwhelmed by pollution.

House Chairperson, Regulatory responses require collaboration among government departments, the private sector, stakeholders, and citizens alike. We are diligently working towards publishing a Polluters' Register to hold individuals accountable for their role in polluting our water resources. Furthermore, we are committed to establishing an Independent Water Regulator and implementing key measures through the Water Services Amendment Bill and National Water Amendment Bill to enhance regulation across the sector.

As we work towards establishing an Independent Water Regulator, we are focusing on several critical areas to strengthen the sector. Ensuring dam safety is one of our highest priorities. Last year, we witnessed dam failures that caused significant damage to communities. We have advised all dam owners to ensure their dams are registered and conduct mandatory safety evaluations. Towards the end of November 2024, DWS published a notice urging property owners to register their dams, receiving 524 applications. We will take strong action against those failing to comply.

We will continue to work collaboratively with various stakeholders that own dams with safety risks to promote compliance and ensure safety. Our goal is to ensure that all dams categorized as having safety risks are registered and comply with statutory safety obligations. We are exploring amending dam safety regulations to enable more engineers to qualify as Approved Professional Persons to conduct evaluations in both public and private sectors.

Water use licensing is another important regulatory function. We are prioritizing addressing historical inequities in water allocation, having allocated significant volumes of water to historically disadvantaged individuals for agricultural irrigation. Our validation and verification program continues to identify unlawful water users for reallocation. In 2024, the public was engaged regarding the proposed amendments to the National Water Act, which will prohibit the trading of water use rights, facilitating a more equitable allocation of water resources.

House Chairperson, in our efforts to empower the next generation, we recently hosted, in partnership with Rand Water, the National Water and Sanitation Youth Indaba, organized by and for young people in the water sector.

This event highlighted the importance of youth engagement, equipping young individuals with skills and ensuring they have a voice in shaping the future of our water sector. Youth involvement is crucial for the sustainability of our water resources. By empowering young people, we are not only fostering innovation and fresh ideas but also ensuring that the next generation is prepared to tackle the challenges that lie ahead.

The department has conducted workshops for SMMEs in all nine provinces on supply chain management and procurement of water-related commodities. We partnered with EWSETA to train youth in the Western and Eastern Cape as process controllers, and this collaboration will continue for five more years, expanding to other municipalities. This year, we will also partner with civil society to train persons living with disabilities in basic plumbing skills and entrepreneurship, while implementing capacity-building

programs such as the Women in Water awards and an entrepreneurs' incubation program.

In conclusion, the journey towards a sustainable water future that fosters a healthy environment for economic growth, requires our collective efforts. By investing in our youth, engaging our communities, and holding polluters accountable, we can secure a healthier environment for all South Africans. Together, let us build a thriving economy that creates jobs and ensures the well-being of our communities.

I thank you!