

Speech Delivered by the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, Mr Ronnie Kasrils, at the Annual General Meeting of the Drilling Contractors Association of Southern Africa at the Pretoria Showgrounds on 6 May 2000

Mevrou Naomi van der Walt, President of the DCASA, members of the Association, distinguished guests, friends, contractors and exhibitors, ladies and gentlemen.

Good morning to you all, gooie more, dumelang, sanibonani. I am very pleased to be with you all today and to have the honour of officially opening your second annual meeting as well as your sector's impressive and important show and exhibition. Madam President, for a change it's sunny here today, after five months of rain in most parts of the country. My colleagues are ribbing me, that I have overdelivered and saturated the market and the rain must stop.

The DCASA has made great strides since its inception in 1998 and now represents the interests of over two hundred members as well as workers from the drilling rigs for whom you are responsible.

Today's activities will help you build further on the platform you have created which has helped you reach out to the suppliers of drilling equipment and engineering sector as the exhibits of equipment and technology associated with the industry testifies and in fact further afield than that.

An indication of your growing role in our country's life and of your extending out-reach is the schools' competition that the DCASA and my department have jointly organised. This has reached out to over five thousand schools countrywide and the topic: 'The best suggestion for water conservation measures,' is both challenging and apt. Alongside everyone here I will be looking forward to handing over the prize to the winning school. This initiative illustrates your concern for water conservation and therefore the lifeblood of our country and our people's future and is most commendable.

Our joint work in organising the schools competition is reflective of the growing positive developing relationship between the DCASA and my Department which I have encouraged and welcome and will continue to pursue.

Madam President, as we all know, our country's water comes from rain and our rainfall is notoriously unreliable. The recent floods reminded me of a poem "the ancient mariner" adrift at sea who commented 'water water everywhere but not a drop to drink.' Also as the farmers always say, 'if the drought doesn't get you, the floods will.'

Much of the country is in fact dry and can be referred to as suffering from water stress.

Silver lining to the storms and recent floods is the recharging of ground water depleted by the droughts during the 1980s and early 90's. But the natural process whereby aquifers are recharged is slow and can take years for a return to a satisfactory level.

Thankfully we have a large percentage of ground water to augment the surface water from our rivers and dams. We do not have as much ground water as we would like and it is not always of the best quality. This makes finding adequate ground water supplies that much more of a challenge. Fortunately the science and art of finding underground water and drilling for it has an impressive record of development in our country. Skill and expertise has grown side by side with the development of equipment and technology. And I believe has created a niche of expertise that has made its mark in the world. For this, we have not only the water sector but also the mining and energy industries to thank. It is part of the process that is enabling South Africa to successfully compete in the global market.

I am very pleased to report that I had an extremely useful meeting with the delegation of the DCASA led by President Naomi van der Walt a few months after taking over my Cabinet portfolio. Maybe they were expecting to find some fiery red, a military version of the "rooi gevaar". I believe they realised we could work well together.

The Association is an important role player that shares common objectives with my Department for protection of our country's ground water resources for short and long term sustainable utilisation. Whether from such threats as pollution and contamination to irresponsible drilling, abstracting and over-pumping of bore-holes. As a result, there has been extensive interaction between the Association and Department which has addressed issues of mutual concern.

Madam President, members of the Drilling Association, the issue of water use authorisation based on the Water Services Act (1997) and the National Water Act (1998) is an area of common ground between my

Department and the Drilling Contractors Association. The Association can assist us in providing information on the degree and nature of ground water use. This information is essential in maintaining the balance of the social, economic and ecological benefits of water, and for us to ensure that the use of water is truly sustainable in the long term. To this end the National Water Act (1998) has established a system of registering water use which is implemented in our regional offices with which your members interact nationwide.

In addition to protection of water resources, my Department has a constitutional obligation for providing safe, clean water to all our citizens. It is still a reality that large numbers of South Africans do not have the luxury of clean and safe water to drink. In many communities people must carry water over long distances on a daily basis – usually the women and children are faced with this task. Images of women with buckets on their heads must be made a thing of the past.

Safe water supply is essential in uplifting the quality of life of South Africans. In addition communities that do not have basic water supply cannot be productive in the economic sector. They cannot become self-sufficient and self-supporting. They remain in the cycle of poverty.

Under the pressure of limited water resources we face a backlog of water services provision. To date, we have supplied some five million people, and we have a priority goal to continue with the supply of water and sanitation. Still over ten million more people are without water service and twenty million are without adequate sanitation.

Rural Water Supply

Water supply to the thousand of dispersed rural communities provides a particular challenge to my department and country. We cannot invest in expensive schemes which will have to be so widespread that the country cannot afford the cost. We need many small scale, localised schemes that meet specific needs of the communities involved.

Ground water has emerged as the key to solve this problem. With relatively low treatment requirement, ground water provides an affordable and sustainable option for communities who can be empowered to take over the operation of the scheme once it is implemented. Members of the Association have played a role in several of these rural supply schemes. I encourage you to become even more involved, especially in training the community members to operate and carry out routine maintenance of the systems. Please take note: For a

scheme to stand the test of time, the community and in particular women, must be involved in all phases from planning to operation.

The Department is committed to building capacity of emerging professionals – relevant to drilling industry.

The Drilling Association has supported the need to train the historically disadvantaged drillers. We look to the Association to act as mentors and facilitator of emerging drillers and companies. A big challenge for the Association is for the association to get new members as well as greater representivity of your association.

It is clear that national government cannot shoulder the responsibility alone for all the objectives of the National Water Act. This Act is in the interests of all of us here today, and the health and well-being of our future generations. We all have a responsibility to do what we can to achieve the goals of the Act. Your Association and its members can and are playing a role as partners in meeting some of these goals.

We may have different points of departure – different needs and expectations, but our objectives should be the same: to ensure a stable water resource base for sustainable utilisation, sustainable economic and social development.

My Department has a higher regard for what your association has achieved since its establishment as far as training and raising the standard of drilling activities is concerned. For this I have great appreciation and want to congratulate you on your achievements.

I wish to assure of my and my Department's willingness to work with you and all role players in the ground water industry to improve the protection and sustained delivery of this precious resource to our people. Because the issue of water resource conservation and use is so crucial to our people and country's needs, now and in the future, I urge all in the ground water field to co-operate so that government may have a streamlined interaction and understanding with all concerned.

Let me conclude by wishing you success in your endeavours here today and in the future. Today's proceedings are another significant milestone in the history of the Drilling Contractors Association of South Africa.

Good luck. Loop wel. Goed gedoen. Hamba kahle. And more power to your drills and pumps.

I declare the show officially opened.