

**SPEECH BY MR RONNIE KASRILS, MP, MINISTER OF WATER
AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY AT THE OPENING OF THE DURBAN
WATER RECYCLING PLANT ON 25 JULY 2001 AT 14:30 IN DURBAN**

Ladies and gentlemen, honoured guests, it is a pleasure to be here today to open this water recycling plant. Eighteen months ago, we launched this project, and now the project is ready to come on stream and to make a difference to water supply and effluent disposal in Durban.

When the project was launched, I said that South Africa could not afford the luxury of being careless in the use and management of its precious water resources. As we all well know, South Africa is a water scarce country. Our rainfall is well below the world average. It is unevenly distributed across the country, and unevenly distributed across the years. Even KwaZulu-Natal, which gets more than its fair share of our rainfall, faces problems of water scarcity and frequent periods of drought. Increased water use efficiency is, therefore, more and more important in South Africa.

At the same time, South Africa is faced with the major challenge of providing water to millions of previously unserved people, many of whom cannot afford to pay for these services. In the past seven years my department has provided water to nearly 7 million people, but there are still millions of people that we

have to reach. At the same time, we have said that we will provide 6 000 litres of water per household per month free of charge. We are already halfway towards meeting this challenge for those people who have access to water, but we still have a long way to go, both in providing water to people and in ensuring that basic human needs are serviced free of charge. The Durban Metro has much to be proud of, having been a leader in the provision of free basic water, long before it became a policy of the National Government.

A further challenge that faces South Africa is that of managing the effluent and pollution that arises from industrial development and urban growth. Throughout the country our rivers, estuaries and coastal zone are under increasing pressure from pollution from a variety of sources. For many years the ocean was considered a vast rubbish bin, a dumping ground of such size and with such dilution potential that disposal to sea could not be a problem. Now we know better, and we know that we cannot continue to indiscriminately dispose of waste matter into the sea.

Durban Metro is a leader in the field of water use efficiency in South Africa. Over the past few years Durban has not only implemented some very effective water conservation and demand management programmes, it has also managed to be extremely innovative in the ways in which to provide water to poor and indigent households.

The challenge to increase water use and efficiency, the challenge to manage and reduce pollution, and the challenge to provide services to the unserved, all require considerable innovation and creativity.

They are also areas in which the support of the international community can be extremely useful, not only through donor support, but also through the experience and knowledge of the international community. Public-private partnerships are a key part of development in the South African context. Public-private partnerships enable a synergy between the best that Government and the private sector have to offer.

Vivendi, the French-based company, is an international partner that brings such experience and knowledge to the South African context. This project is a first not only for Durban, but also for South Africa, and such knowledge and experience is a key part of the success.

This project will contribute to the management of industrial effluent in Durban, as well as reducing the demand for water. The environmental benefits to the city and to the stressed Durban South Industrial Basin will be significant. This project will provide a beacon of hope in an area in dire need of rehabilitation.

The project will also ease the demand for potable water in the city and reduce the cost of this precious resource to industry.

This project is the result of a great deal of innovative thinking on the part of Durban Metro and the industries and other partners involved. It is also the result of a project of the South Africa-France Export Credit Agreement, emanating from a protocol signed between the two countries in October 1995. This protocol showed the rapprochement between the two countries subsequent to the liberation of South Africa from the yoke of apartheid in 1994. Prior to that date, the French government had been proactive in the battle against apartheid and a number of French companies heeded the call to withdraw from South Africa in the interests of breaking the apartheid government through economic sanctions.

I believe it was in 1985 that the French government decided to stop all new investment in South Africa, a year before the European Union made a similar ruling. Vivendi Water respected this decision and it was only after the release of Nelson Mandela and his inauguration as our first democratic president that Vivendi took the decision to invest locally. This investment is an important step in support of the new South Africa, a country much in need of international investment and development.

The result of this project is that Durban Metro can delay capital expansion projects for at least another five years. During this period, capital that would otherwise have been used for this expansion, can be used for other services in the Durban Metro area. At the same time it has freed up potable water for about 300 000 people in the Durban Metro area. This approach has achieved what can only be described as a win-win situation. It is one that I hope will serve as a lesson throughout South Africa.

I am delighted, therefore, to be here at the opening today, and I hope that municipalities and industry throughout South Africa will be looking at this project and learning from it as we move forward to a cleaner, more sustainable and more equitable future in South Africa.

I thank you.