



DEPARTMENT OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY

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MINISTER

DRAFT SPEECH: WESTERN CAPE WATER SUMMIT ON 19 MAY 2003 IN CAPE TOWN

I enclose a draft speech for your consideration and possible use at the Western Cape Water Summit to be held in Cape Town on 19 May 2003. I also enclose an electronic copy of the speech should you wish to make amendments to the speech.

Acting DIRECTOR-GENERAL

DATE:

SPEECH BY MR RONNIE KASRILS, MP, MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY
AT THE WESTERN CAPE WATER SUMMIT ON 19 MAY 2003 IN CAPE TOWN

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great privilege and honour for me to welcome and address you today.

The Western Cape Legislature is to be complimented for arranging this Water Summit. It not only recognises the importance of water to the provincial economy, but it also recognises the importance of one of the most fundamental requirements for successful water management, which is co-operation among all spheres of Government - indeed among all role players - to ensure that water is used for the social and economic development of the entire country.

We are all aware of the need to create jobs in South Africa – unemployment and poverty are unacceptably high. One of the challenges that faces us is how to use our scarce water resources most effectively to achieve what the National Water Act describes as “beneficial use in the public interest”; water use that contributes to the building of a South Africa free of poverty, hunger and deprivation.

The National Water Policy (1997) and the National Water Act (1998) both say that water is an indivisible national asset that is to be managed by the National Government for the benefit of all people. The National Water Resource Strategy, which is scheduled for completion later this year, sets out a suite of nationally-consistent approaches for managing water resources, and details of many of these will be presented to you later in the proceedings.

Details will also be presented to you of the water situation in South Africa as a whole, and in the four water management areas that make up the Western Cape. It is clear that there are considerable differences in climate, water availability and water use not only across the country, but also within the region itself. These differences are acknowledged in the National Strategy, which allows considerable flexibility in the application of water management approaches to accommodate them.

From a water resources point of view the Western Cape is quite different from the rest of the country. In the first place it is a winter rainfall area, which requires different approaches to, for instance, managing water in storage for irrigation in comparison with the summer rainfall areas. The Western Cape is also geographically separated from the rest of the country by the harsh Karoo and difficult topography. These factors limit the economically-viable opportunities for increasing the amount of water available in the area by, for instance, transferring water from better watered parts of the country, as has been done extensively to serve the industrial heartland of Gauteng. As outlined in the National Water Resource Strategy, the potential for additional water from especially the Berg Water Management Area is very limited. Exploitable

resources in the region are the rain that falls and flows in rivers and streams, relatively limited quantities of groundwater, and the sea, the latter being a resource for the future which is not yet economically viable under current conditions. The re-use of water from effluent currently being discharged to the ocean should also be seriously considered as this is a large quantity which can be blended into existing supplies.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry and I are well aware of the water resources issues facing the Western Cape and are continually working in a pro-active way towards resolving these. The Berg Water Project being a prime manifestation of successful cooperation on the local, regional and national levels. Whilst the potential still exists for possible new water resource developments in the Breede River catchment which may serve for transfer to Cape Town, the options for new dams to be built and for more water to be abstracted from our rivers are rapidly disappearing. Given the unique environmental heritage of the Cape, the potential impact of water resource development projects on ecologically sensitive river systems also needs to be given particular consideration.

Securing the sufficient supply of water to meet continued growth in the larger Cape Town metropolitan area, which is one of the most important and fastest growing urban areas in the country, is likely to remain the main water resources issue in the Western Cape for the foreseeable future. Pressures will mount for the ever more efficient use of water, whilst the cost of water from new sources will continue to rise until it reaches the equivalent price of desalination of seawater. Theoretically that could serve as an unlimited source of supply, although use of desalinated water will be restricted by affordability, which also links back to the substantial power requirements for such operation. The potential also exists for the possible abstraction of large quantities of water from deep sources such as the Table Mountain Group aquifers, which is the subject of ongoing investigations.

We are acutely aware of the importance of irrigated agriculture to the economy of the Western Cape and in the provision of employment and livelihoods for the poor. Therefore my Department's leading action or participation in initiatives such as the identification of development options in the Breede and Doring River basins, the raising of the Clanwilliam Dam, and groundwater investigations.

We are aware of the prime potato growing areas in the Sandveld and of the strong tourism potential along the West Coast, both which primarily depend on underground sources for water, sources which we know are being over-exploited in some parts and which also have ecologically very important and sensitive vleis which depend on them. These have and are being further investigated to ensure the long-term productive and sustainable use of groundwater in the region. Desalination of seawater will also become a serious option for the expansion of supplies to some coastal settlements.

Similar pressures for more water with the simultaneous need for greater protection of ecologically sensitive salt marshes exist along the southern coastal area, where some of the strongest growth is experienced outside the Cape Town area.

It is therefore especially important in this region to regard water resources as scarce and precious, and to ensure that they are managed as effectively and efficiently as possible. The inclusion of extensive water conservation and water demand management strategies in the Water Service Development Plans of local authorities, the Water Management Plans of agriculture orientated water user associations, and in licence conditions of water users, are primary vehicles for achieving these goals.

The management of water must also be seen in the context of the national objectives which we want to achieve. It is therefore important that all stakeholders and the general public be aligned to a common vision for integrated water resource management.

We are transferring responsibility for operation of a number of water schemes to water user associations. We find that people who are in the fields at six o'clock in the morning do a better job of enforcing water use rules than a distant bureaucracy.

The challenge is to transform "irrigation boards" which were used by past governments to subsidise their rural supporters into new organisations which reflect the values of our new South Africa. This has been a sobering experience given the mistrust and resistance which still plague our farming communities. Since irrigation water users are still mainly white commercial farmers, we include local government and black farmer representatives. But they still need support to empower them and their poor and vulnerable rural communities to participate effectively, not simply as spectators.

Fortunately, much of the infrastructure still belongs to the State and while we encourage farmers to take over its management, we can rightfully insist that this must be done in a way that reflects the values of the new South Africa. Accordingly, I have instructed my Director-General to establish systematic oversight of the water user associations to ensure that their human resource and procurement policies are in line with government policy and that they actively find ways to help change the composition of the commercial farming community.

In this respect Water User Associations have a specific role to develop, capacitate and empower all users, especially those who were previously disadvantaged. They need to focus on the need for respect for conditions of employment, right to organise, as well as basic human dignity. It is also expected that Water User Associations actively seek opportunities and expand participation in irrigated agriculture to the resource poor groups.

This brings me to the important issue of institutions for water management. The differences between, say, the highly urbanised Berg River Water Management area and the relatively sparsely populated Olifants-Doring area indicate that the nature of the catchment management agencies that will be established to manage their water resources will be quite distinct. The Western Cape already progressed quite well in drafting proposals for the establishment of the Catchment Management Agencies for the Breede, Gouritz and Olifants-Doorn Water Management Areas. There is one common requirement for the success of these agencies, no matter how different they may be, and that is their need for support and co-operation from provincial government, local governments, and all water users.

In 1989 Jerome Delli Priscoli, a strategist with the United States Bureau of Reclamation wrote:-

Institutions are the embodiment of values in regularised patterns of behaviour. The institutions and organisations that supply and distribute water resources reflect society's values towards equity, freedom and justice.

This is true, but no matter how good our water institutions are, no matter how well they manage the distribution and use of water, they cannot directly control all the activities that have an impact on water resources.

Our legislation and the departments in all spheres of government that administer them, is organised in such a way that integrated management of water can succeed only if there is a high degree of co-operation between all role players. This is particularly true in respect of managing the use of land, and managing the discharge of waste into water resources, both of which are the joint responsibility of my Department and provincial and local authorities, and both of which can have dramatic effects on water resources, especially on water quality. It has come to my attention that various sewage spillages and operational problems at waste water treatment works are jeopardising the quality of the river systems, affecting the Reserve and affecting the health of communities and the quality of agricultural water use. Better management of these need the attention of us all.

There is also a need for all role players to share whatever information they gather from their water monitoring networks, so that everyone is working from the same information base.

It is of course important that co-operation begins with planning, and the National Water Resource Strategy discusses the relationships between water-related planning at national and water management area levels, Provincial Development Strategies, and the local level Integrated Development Plans and their associated Water Services Development Plans.

The information on the availability of and requirements for water in the National Water Resource Strategy, which will be available in more detail in the Catchment Management Strategies when they are developed, is intended to assist provincial and local governments to plan their water-dependent developments within the constraints of the water resource. This is not a one-way relationship, however, and water resources managers must take account of the needs and requirements of provincial and local authorities, as they are reflected in their planning documents, in developing their water allocation and use strategies and plans. I anticipate that the development of Catchment Management Strategies will be an iterative process undertaken in parallel with the development of provincial and local plans and strategies, and it is clear that this will require the highest possible levels of co-operation between the planners in the various responsible organisations.

There is therefore a pressing need to develop supportive and co-operative relationships between water management institutions and provincial and local governments, so that we move as rapidly as possible to a situation in which water is a vehicle for social and economic development, especially for the eradication of the scourge of poverty, for the benefit of all people. I am confident that this will be one of the outcomes of this Summit.

I wish you well in your discussions and deliberations during the next two days.

I thank you.

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