

**SPEECH BY MR RONNIE KASRILS, MP, MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY AT THE LAUNCH OF NATIONAL WATER WEEK AT THE OPENING OF THE RAISING OF THE MIDMAR DAM PROJECT ON 22 MARCH 2004 AT THE MIDMAR DAM IN KWAZULU-NATAL**

Honourable guests –

Representatives of Eskom, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour for me to address you at this event for National Water Week 2004, and to be hosted by your community, and partners.

Once again we have come together to celebrate water, and to celebrate the delivery of Government. Yes, today we celebrate 10 years of freedom and democracy in our country. We celebrate our progress that we have jointly achieved, people and Government working together for the past 10 years. Yes we have strived over the past ten years to ensure that through water, a better life for all has been gained, and that through water, we have taken great strides to wash away poverty. Indeed Water is Washing away Poverty .

This year's National Water Week celebrations co-incides with our Ten Year Celebrations of our democratic government. We have come a long way in the past 10 years. In 1994, about 14 million of our people did not have access to safe clean drinking water and approximately 21 million of our people did not have access to a basic level of sanitation.

This year we will celebrate the 10 millionth person receiving access to water since 1994. Yes, this Government has shown it is possible to create a better life for all our people , especially the poorest of the poor. For the 10 million, there is no more carrying heavy water containers long distances, no more taking water from polluted rivers and streams, no more walking long distances up and down hills, no diseases because of polluted water, no more deaths from crocodile attacks. Yes we are creating a better life for all our people. To date, Free Basic Water services are being provided by 87% of local governments; and this basic level of service is reaching:

- 64,4% of the national population; and
- 49,4% of the poor pouplation.

But we must remember that our work is not completed. We must make sure that those who have not yet received water and sanitation services, receive them in the shortest

possible time. Your Government is saying we are working towards ensuring that by 2008 those of our people that are not yet receiving water will have access to clean water and that by 2010 all our people will have access to basic sanitation.

Our Government is determined to eradicate poverty and to provide a better life for all and to improve the lives of all citizens. Despite the challenges we face, much has changed over the past ten years.

Thus, it is a privilege and an honour for me to be here in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands (... A mere stone's throw from the historic spot where our former President, Nelson Mandela was taken into custody ... )

Ten years ago we shared the joy of liberation in South Africa. About 2 million in the Mgeni River catchment had to fetch their water from springs, from distant rivers, or, if they were lucky, from distant wells and boreholes. People of this area are also familiar with the devastating impacts of cholera and drought that worsen the plight of women and children. Now, ten years later, I can say with pride, that our government has brought safe, clean water to many rural communities.

In providing water to rural households, we have liberated innumerable women from the drudgery and labour of fetching water over long distances. We have liberated innumerable women from the agony of nursing family members made ill by poor water and lack of hygiene. We have enabled these women to carry themselves with pride as members of water committees, as labourers on water projects, as citizens of South Africa.

A few years ago we also realised that providing the infrastructure was not enough when our people could not afford the water that it delivers. Our Constitution guarantees people the right of access to sufficient water and we developed the free basic water policy: a policy which allows for 6 000 litres per household per month free of charge.

Government has also made progress in addressing the issue of sanitation. Alongside the provision of basic sanitation, we began a major health and hygiene campaign. Water, sanitation and hygiene became our watchword - WASH! A programme that we have championed not only in South Africa, but in international forums as well.

Part of this campaign, which is gathering momentum daily, is the campaign to eradicate the bucket system. We have set ourselves the target of eradicating the bucket system

throughout the country by 2007 and one of the projects designed to achieve this goal is the Bruntville/Phumlas project not far from here, in your District Municipality area.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have come a long way in the water sector since 1994. When I look at the achievements we have made in these ten years, I am proud to be a South African. I am proud of my fellow South Africans who have made these achievements possible.

There are, however, still major challenges facing us! We need to continually improve the quality of the basic services that we are providing to people. We need to upgrade, maintain and refurbish aging infrastructure, and we need to invest in new infrastructure - dams, water treatment works, major pipelines, pump stations.

Government cannot and will not abdicate from its function to ensure that services are delivered. Over the past ten years National Government has focused on directly assisting Local Government provide basic water and sanitation services rapidly to people living in rural areas. The context has now changed and Cabinet recently approved the Strategic Framework for Water Services. The Strategic Framework provides a comprehensive summary of policy with respect to the water services sector in South Africa and sets out a plan for its implementation over the next ten years.

It sets out the vision that we must work towards continually improving the levels of service that we deliver to our people. We would like to see not only the provision of communal taps, but ultimately the provision of household connections for the majority of South Africans. This is a long term target, but we have shown over the past few years that we can move mountains if we set our minds to it, and I believe that an ambitious goal will challenge us to aspire to ever greater heights.

I am proud to be able to open the first phase of the Mooi-Mgeni Transfer scheme, which was funded by Umgeni Water. This scheme comprises the following :

- A new, much larger, Mearns Weir on the Mooi River near the town of Mooi River;
- An upgraded Pumping Station;
- Transferring water via an existing pipeline from the Weir to the upper reaches of the Mpozana, Lions and Mgeni Rivers, to flow into Midmar Dam; and
- Raising the Midmar Dam, the finished product now standing proudly before us.

Midmar Dam was built by the Department in the early 1960's for Pietermaritzburg and Durban and met the demand for some 10 years. This was followed by the Albert Falls Dam in the 1970's and, as the demand grew, the Inanda Dam in the 1990's. Umgeni Water was established after the construction of the Albert Falls Dam, as a regional bulk water service provider, to take water from the dams, purify it and distribute it to the various municipalities.

With the advent of our new National Water Act in 1998, the emphasis changed from building new dams to more efficient use of water, embodied in the principles of Water Conservation and Demand Management. The available water in the Mgeni catchment is finite and fully allocated.

This means that there would be a limit to the amount of water which could be supplied to the cities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg. Their economies are growing, as well as their need for water and we had to take steps to address the situation.

Before I approve a new scheme, I, as Minister, must be convinced that no stone has been left unturned to ensure that every drop of water in the area concerned is being used optimally and that no water is being unnecessarily wasted. This was indeed the case when the go-ahead for the first phase of the Mooi-Mgeni Transfer Scheme was given in 1999.

Prior to embarking on the scheme, other alternatives were investigated. These included :

- Water demand management initiatives, many of which were implemented;
- Construction of a large storage dam on the Mooi River at the Mearns site, associated with a tunnel to the Mgeni catchment;
- Construction of a dam on the Mkomazi River including a 30 km tunnel to the Midmar catchment;
- Construction of the Spring Grove Dam on the upper Mooi River and transfer facilities.

Risk analyses performed by my Department and Umgeni Water showed that whilst the demand management initiatives had a positive impact, they were, on their own, not sufficient to meet the growing water demands.

Further comprehensive studies by our Engineers and Consultants showed that the existing weir, built on the Mooi River as an emergency scheme during the severe drought in the

early 80's, needed to be rebuilt to provide a more sustainable supply to be pumped to Midmar.

We have now built a new concrete weir, standing 3 storeys high and 300 m long, with a storage capacity of some 5 million m<sup>3</sup>. This diverts water to the Mearns Pumping Station from where the water is pumped to the Mpofona stream, to flow into Midmar Dam.

We have raised the Midmar Dam by means of an innovative LABYRINTH spillway (which has a zig-zag pattern), which allows double the flow that a normal spillway would have passed. This has been implemented in the interests of the safety of all those living downstream, including the Durban CBD. This is the first time a fixed labyrinth spillway has been incorporated on top of an existing gravity dam wall and has increased the storage capacity to 235 million m<sup>3</sup>, a 32 % increase !

Extensive teamwork and co-operation is involved in the planning, design, construction and ultimate operation of a water resource development such as this. For many of the government officials, water board employees and consultants it is part of their job. However, for many of the local community members, the time that was contributed in providing input to the planning and assistance in the monitoring of construction was voluntary. In this regard, sincere thanks should be extended to the following community committees.

- Mooi River Liaison Forum;
- Mearns Weir Basin Monitoring Committee;
- Mearns Weir Basin Management Committee;
- Receiving Streams Environmental Working Group;
- Midmar Dam Environmental Project Liaison Committee.

The Mearns Weir Basin Management Committee continues to operate and take collective responsibility for the management of the land around the Mearns Weir basin.

In terms of labour for the construction work at Midmar Dam and Mearns Weir, as well as the riparian clearing programme for the receiving streams, approximately 200 jobs were created for people from the Mooi River, Mpophomeni and nearby areas for a period of up to 24 months.

Environmental management is a key component of any development and this project is no exception. If you glance around the basin of the Midmar Dam, you will note that the basin

looks a little emptier than it used to be. This is because 486 trees were chopped down to make way for the new water level. I must add though, that all except 2 trees were alien. As part of this project the plan is to replant 1 indigenous tree in the Midmar Dam basin for every tree that had to be removed.

The receiving stream into which the water is pumped, also needed considerable attention. To ensure that the passage of water pumped from the Mooi River does not impact on individual property rights or activities, the following actions were carried out with respect to the receiving stream :

- A 41 km long 'servitude of aqueduct' was registered along the route;
- All public road bridges were checked and improved, to make sure that they would cater for the increased flow;
- Compensation was paid to respective landowners for private crossing and pump installations that would be flooded;
- Umgeni Water carried out a massive clean-up campaign in which alien vegetation and wooden debris that would potentially block the free flow of water was removed from the riparian zone; and
- Wetland areas were rehabilitated.

Many parts of our country are currently in the grip of a serious drought. KwaZulu-Natal is no exception – After completion of the raising of the Midmar Dam, on schedule, in December 2002, in time for that years' rainy season, with the dam storing 52 % of its new capacity we all waited with bated breath for it to fill – but to no avail. A year later, the level had dropped to 31 % and water restrictions had been imposed in Pietermaritzburg as a precautionary measure. With the additional storage created at Mearns on the Mooi River, we have been able to pump 3 cubic metres per second on a more sustained basis and I am pleased to say that with our pumping and the bit of rain which has fallen over the past months, the level has risen to a about 56 %.

Let us remember what our President has said. He said that all South Africans have to stand up and lend a hand in creating a better life for all – VUK' UZENZELE. Let us use water for the common good, to enrich the lives of all our citizens. Let us all work for a better South Africa. Let Water wash away Poverty.

I believe this magnificent scheme, the Mooi-Mgeni Transfer Scheme bears testimony to the fact that the Government is doing its utmost to “Bring a better life for all” – particularly to the citizens of KwaZulu-Natal. I, therefore, declare the scheme open.

Thank you honourable guests:

A special thanks to all our sponsors, especially Eskom.

**Amanzi ayimpilo!**