

# Access to water is a right that includes responsibilities

IT'S THAT week again when we put human rights and water in the spotlight. As a country, we celebrate Human Rights Day on March 21 (Friday) and then join the world in celebrating World Water Day on March 22.

Water is life and a catalyst for socio-economic development and this makes access to clean and safe water a basic human right. This year we celebrate these special days against the backdrop of full dams and swelling rivers as a result of significant rainfall across the country. In as much as we have enough water in storage and in our water resources, it is important to remember that South Africa is among the top 30 driest countries in the world. It is therefore important that we all become responsible citizens and use the available water wisely and sparingly, especially as we head into the dry winter season in most parts of the country.

This year World Water Day is celebrated under the theme "Glacier Preservation", which aims to highlight the fact that glaciers are melting rapidly, disrupting water flows and affecting millions of people through floods, drought, and rising sea levels. For a country like South Africa, it raises the importance of adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change to protect communities and ecosystems for sustainable water supply.

World Water Day 2025 emphasises the need for global action to manage meltwater sustainably and other water resources by reducing emissions, and securing vital water resources for the future. South Africa is a water scarce country and this is exacerbated by an escalating demand due to economic and population growth, urbanisation and rising standards of living, wastage, as well as increasing pollution which renders water unfit for use.

Every human right is accompanied by responsibilities. It is our responsibility to use water sparingly, to ensure that leaks are fixed and to report leaks in the bulk lines to the relevant authorities. They have the obligation to ensure access to water for all residents and should invest in infrastructure development, operations and maintenance. As much as we all need our right to clean and safe water fulfilled, we have the responsibility to protect and safeguard our water supply infrastructure.

**THEMBA KHOZA** | Department of Water and Sanitation