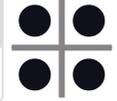




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SERVICE DELIVERY

Water infrastructure must be declared critical

HOSIA SITHOLE

A REPORT recently released by the SA Human Rights Commission into the pollution of the Vaal River points to rivers and associated water infrastructure as the mainstay of our economy, and importantly, for this infrastructure throughout the country to be declared as critical infrastructure in terms of the Critical Infrastructure Protection Act 8 of 2019.

Among some of its objectives, this piece of legislation provides for the protection of critical infrastructure as it is essential for public safety, national security and the continuous provision of basic public services.

The wanton acts of vandalism of water infrastructure, which continue unabated, are one of the main reasons there is a need for all major water infrastructure to be declared as critical

infrastructure in terms of the act.

This is particularly important given that the loss, damage, disruption or immobilisation of water infrastructure severely affects the safety of the public and the provision of basic services. In this regard, the Criminal Matters Amendment Act 18 of 2015, which amends the Criminal Law Amendment Act 105 of 1997, should be applied strictly to impose the discretionary minimum sentences for essential infrastructure-related offences.

This act seeks to ensure that there are stricter conditions for the granting of bail in respect of essential infrastructure-related offences, and that there are also harsher sentences for perpetrators.

On top of being a semi-arid country, damage to water infrastructure limits the capacity to ensure that water does not continue to be unevenly distrib-

uted. To a large extent, communities in rural areas are disproportionately affected by the uneven distribution of water.

Thus, the continued damage to water infrastructure leads to serious challenges of water quality as a result of pollution emanating from malicious acts of destruction of water infrastructure. The extent of damage being inflicted on the water infrastructure has reached such proportions that urgent action is needed to stem the tide of destruction and also for decisive action to be taken to prevent this challenge from evolving into a crisis.

For these reasons, it is vital that all water infrastructure be declared critical infrastructure.

Declaring all water infrastructure as critical will assist in protecting this most valuable resource and would go some way to improving our dire water

situation. This is even more significant when one takes into account the difficult financial situation of our country, which has been compounded by the outbreak of the coronavirus.

With the limited financial resources we have, we cannot continue to fix infrastructure that has been destroyed. We must use these limited financial resources to expand water infrastructure, without which the delivery of basic services would be impossible. The focus should be on making existing infrastructure more accessible to those who presently do not enjoy access to water. The call for water infrastructure to be declared critical infrastructure therefore fits together with efforts by Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation Minister Lindiwe Sisulu to have dams declared national key points.

Minister Sisulu has consistently raised concerns over the manner in

which the public interacts with water infrastructure.

Our ability to build the most impressive infrastructure will amount to nothing if everything is not done to safeguard it, and this failure could lead to the failure of our economy.

Declaring all water infrastructure as critical infrastructure would put the country on course to attain Sustainable Development Goal 6 to deal with some of our serious challenges, including poverty, climate change and conflict.

Accordingly, for all our water infrastructure to continue to perform optimally and to serve communities sufficiently and effectively, it must be guarded against destruction and should be declared as critical infrastructure.

Sithole is communicator at the Department of Water and Sanitation.