

MEDIA STATEMENT

DWS ensures compliance after farm owner's illegal abstraction of water from Liebenbergsvlei River in Reitz

10 December 2021

The Department of Water and Sanitation has remained steadfast in its commitment to carry out its regulatory mandate of ensuring accountable water use. This is demonstrated after it found a farm owner illegally abstracting water from Liebenbergsvlei River in Reitz in the Free State.

It has been found that the farm owner was in contravention of the National Water Act and water use authorisation following an inspection by the Department's Compliance, Monitoring and Evaluation unit in November where it was found that the owner was illegally abstracting water from the river for irrigation purposes on his farm.

DWS officials had previously visited the farm in May this year where they observed that a generator of the farm owner may have caused pollution of the Liebenbergsvlei River. The exhaust pipe of the generator was low to the ground which caused soot to accumulate on the ground next to the generator.

During that inspection an illegal excavation works on the banks of the river for the fitting of pumps and pipes was noted therefore contravening Sections 21 (c) and (i) of the National Water Act which prohibits impeding or diverting the flow of water in a watercourse. However, at the following site inspection in early November the excavated channel had been closed.

DWS officials have been in talks with the owner's legal counsel after a directive was issued to shut down the illegal abstraction of water, in which the farm owner denied all allegations levelled against him.

He maintained that the water being pumped from the river is within a legal lease agreement, which means water use is lawful, and used for irrigation on the said property.

However, a lease agreement is not an authorisation to use water or transfer water from one property to another.

A search warrant was issued and DWS officials have been on site to disconnect pumps and pipes used to pump water from Liebenbergsvlei River and all electrical panels.

The Department Spokesperson Sputnik Ratau says a criminal case is expected to be opened against Tack.

Ratau says the department remains committed to ensuring compliance and regulation of our scarce natural resource.

"Let this also be a warning to other farmers that are using freshwater resources illegally, misusers will be charged and operations shut down.

"We live in a water scarce country and this means everyone has to be mindful about the needs of the next person, this includes farmers who use the majority of water," Ratau said.

Meanwhile, Deputy Minister of Water and Sanitation, David Mahlobo, sent a stern warning against illegal water use.

He called on Water User Associations, Irrigation Boards and Water Services Authorities to report unauthorised water use which includes the building of illegal dams.

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“The illegal building of dams is concerning because in most cases, we do not even know the material used to build those dams. It goes without saying that this has a detrimental effect to other water users and the ecosystem.,” said Deputy Minister Mahlobo.

He added that the Department through its Compliance, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, is making significant progress to ensure transgressors are held accountable through regular dam safety inspections and proactive investigations where illegal dam owners are directed to demolish all such dams.

Deputy Minister Mahlobo also urged members of the public to report illegal water use and infrastructure vandalism to local authorities as the Department continues with its effective implementation of bulk water projects across the country, for all socio-economic development.

Issued by the Department of Water & Sanitation

For more information, contact Sputnik Ratau, Spokesperson for the Department of Water and Sanitation on 082 874 2942

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