

MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION MR SENZO MCHUNU AT THE RELEASE OF THE BLUE DROP WATCH REPORT, THE NO DROP WATCH REPORT, AND THE GREEN DROP WATCH REPORT

6 June 2023

Introduction to the Drop Reports

The Green, Blue and No Drop Certification programmes are regulatory mechanisms of the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS). As the water sector regulator in terms of both the National Water Act and Water Services Act, DWS introduced these incentive-based regulation programmes first with the Blue Drop Report in 2008, the Green Drop Report in 2008 and the No Drop Report in 2014.

In 2014, DWS stopped the programmes. Minister Mchunu reintroduced the programmes after he was appointed in late 2021. In 2022, DWS released the 2022 Green Drop Report and the 2022 Blue Drop Progress report.

Purpose of the Drop Reports

The aim of this uniquely South African regulatory tool is to improve municipal drinking water quality, wastewater management as well as water conservation and demand management. The reports keep the public and stakeholders informed and updated with credible data and information about the state of water and sanitation services in the country. The reports also recognise water services institutions that achieve compliance and excellence in providing such services. This serves as an incentive for water services institutions to improve their performance.

The reports identify what needs to be done to address each of the identified shortcomings. In this regard, the reports are a support mechanism, in addition to being a regulatory mechanism, because they provide the owners of the infrastructure with advice and guidance as to how to improve their water and sanitation services.

The Water Cycle

Water for domestic use goes through a cycle. Raw water is drawn from rivers and dams and treated in Water Treatment Works by either water boards or municipalities before it is supplied to households. The treated water is required by law to meet drinking water standards set by the South African Bureau of Standards in South African National Standard (SANS) 241. Municipalities and water boards are also required to conduct regular tests on the treated water to ensure that it complies with the standard.

After the water has been used by households, it goes through the sewer system to municipal Waste Water Treatment Works. The Waste Water Treatment Works remove waste from the water and then return the water to the rivers. The effluent from Waste Water Treatment Works which goes into rivers is also required to meet minimum standards, set by the Department of Water and Sanitation.

The Green and Blue Drop reports

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The Green Drop report is a comprehensive assessment of the state of all waste water treatment systems in South Africa, including municipal, Department of Public Works and private waste water treatment systems. The Blue Drop report is a similar assessment of the state of all drinking water systems (including water treatment works) in the country.

Both reports include assessments of the condition of the infrastructure; whether the capacity of the infrastructure is sufficient to deal with the demand; whether the required maintenance is being done on the infrastructure, whether the infrastructure is operated correctly; whether the proper treatment processes are followed; whether proper monitoring and controls are in place; and whether the staff have the necessary skills and qualifications.

The No Drop report

The No Drop report is an assessment of the degree to which the drinking water distribution systems of municipalities supply water efficiently, without wasting water. The assessment includes the levels of physical water losses in the system (for example through leaks in pipes); levels of non-revenue water; the amount of water used per customer per day; whether infrastructure is being maintained properly to minimise wastage; the existence of plans and strategies to reduce water losses; the effectiveness of metering, billing and revenue collection systems.

The Green, Blue and No Drop Watch Reports

For each drop report, a full assessment is released every two years, and an interim report is released in the alternate year.

Given that the full Green Drop report was released last year, this year we are releasing the Green Drop interim report. The Green Drop interim report is being released in two parts. Today the Department has released the 2023 Green Drop Watch report, which focuses on the progress of municipalities in addressing the findings of the 2022 full Green Drop report. In July this year, we will release the Green Drop Risk Report, which will identify the critical risk areas for waste water treatment systems in the country.

In July this year, the Department will release the full 2023 Blue Drop Report, which will be a complete assessment of the state of all drinking water systems in the country. Today the Department has released the 2023 Blue Drop Watch Report, which provides a technical assessment (covering the condition of infrastructure and drinking water quality) of a sample of the drinking water supply systems in the country. The full Blue Drop report will cover all drinking water supply systems in the country and will also include non-technical aspects such as skills and qualifications of municipal staff.

In September this year, the Department will release the full 2023 No Drop Report. Today the Department has released the 2023 No Drop Watch Report, which is based on water conservation and demand management reports received from a sample of municipalities. The information was used to extrapolate projections regarding the extent of water losses and non-revenue water in the country.

Summary of Findings in the Green Drop Watch Report

The 2022 full Green Drop report identified 334 wastewater systems in a critical condition, in 90 municipalities. Following the release of the 2022 Green Drop report in April 2022, the Department

issued non-compliance notices to all these municipalities, requesting the municipalities to submit corrective action plans to address the shortcomings identified in the report.

The Department received corrective action plans from municipalities for 168 of the 334 wastewater systems (i.e., a 50% response rate). 43 of the 90 municipalities requested support from the Department to develop corrective action plans.

At the end of March 2023, only 34 of the 168 plans submitted to the department were being implemented, with the balance being in planning phase or no progress reported.

For those municipalities which did not submit corrective action plans, the Department has issued directives in terms of the National Water Act compelling them to submit such plans. Criminal charges have been laid against some of the municipalities which have not submitted corrective action plans.

Summary of Findings in the Blue Drop Watch Report

151 out of 1035 water treatment systems in the country were sampled. All water service authorities were covered by the sample.

In terms of the condition of water treatment infrastructure, 3% of the sampled systems were found to be in a critical infrastructural condition; 12% were found to be in a poor infrastructural condition; 49% were found to be in an average infrastructural condition, 31% in a good infrastructural condition; and 5% in an excellent infrastructural condition.

In terms of SANS 241, municipalities are required to monitor the microbiological and chemical quality of the water provided to residents at specified intervals, including hourly, daily, weekly, fortnightly and monthly tests of various types.

Microbiological compliance measures how well the treatment process is removing harmful bacteria and other micro-organisms from the water. Chemical compliance measures the chemical suitability of the water for human consumption, as well as for protection of infrastructure and household equipment. SANS 241 is informed by World Health Organisation Guidelines, in term of which at least 97% (i.e., good or excellent compliance) of tests for microbiological contaminants and chemical compliance conducted over a year should comply with water quality standards, for the water to be considered safe to drink.

Water quality tests carried out by the municipalities themselves during the 2021/2022 municipal financial year were assessed. The results were rated as bad (< 95% of water quality tests meet SANS 241 standards); poor (95-97% of water quality tests meet SANS 241 standards); good (97-99% of water quality tests meet SANS 241 standards) or excellent (> 99% of water quality tests meet SANS 241 standards).

The assessment indicates that:

- 39% of systems achieved excellent, 11% of systems achieved good, 9% achieved poor, and 41% achieved bad microbiological water quality compliance.
- 17% of systems achieved excellent, 13% of systems achieved good, 15% achieved poor, and 55% achieved bad chemical water quality compliance.

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During the audit period 11 municipalities did not report water quality data to the Department or provide any other evidence that they have been testing their water quality. The Department has issued non-compliance notices to those municipalities instructing them to issue advisory notices to their residents that their water might not be safe to drink if it has not been properly tested.

In the 2012 Blue Drop report, only 10% of municipalities had bad or poor microbiological water quality (as opposed to 50% in this sample). This indicates that there has been a deterioration in drinking water quality since the last blue drop report was done.

The 2023 blue drop watch report indicates that the drinking water produced from some municipal water treatment systems during the 2021/2022 municipal financial year did not meet the SANS 241 standard and could on occasion have posed a potential health risk. The report does not provide an indication of the current status of water quality in municipalities.

In terms of SANS241 and the norms and standards issued by DWS under the Water Services Act, when the tests carried out by a municipality indicate that the water supplied poses a health risk, the municipality must inform its consumers that the quality of the water that it supplies poses a health risk. DWS has sent directives to the municipalities identified in the Watch Report as having systems with poor or bad compliance. The directives require the municipalities to inform their residents should they still have poor or bad compliance.

The public can safely consume water from their taps if their municipalities indicate that the water being provided is being tested and meets the requirements of SANS 24. Municipalities are responsible by law to inform affected constituencies as soon as there is any change in quality.

Summary of Findings in the No Drop Watch Report

The report is based on analysis of the water balance data submitted by municipalities for their financial year ending June 2022. The report is based on a sample of 42 datasets which were received from municipalities in 2022 (29% of 144 municipalities which are water services authorities (WSAs) submitted data sets). The national water balance presented in the Watch Report is extrapolated from the sample of datasets received from municipalities to provide an estimate of the water balance and non-revenue water for all 144 WSAs.

The Watch Report estimates the System Input Volume (meaning the total volume of water treated for municipal use) to be 4,3 million m³/annum. Of this 2 million m³/annum (46%) is estimated to be non-revenue water (NRW). This is the volume of water that municipalities are unable to collect revenue for. Non-revenue water is made up of water losses and the unbilled component of authorised consumption. The international average for non-revenue water is below 30%. In 2015 when the last No Drop report was published, the national NRW figure was estimated to be 35%.

The report estimates per capita water consumption to be approximately 216 litres/capita/day compared to the international average of 173 l/c/d. This is an anomaly given that South Africa is a water scarce country.

The high level of physical losses in municipal distribution systems is one of the main reasons for the relatively high level of per capita consumption in South Africa. Poor operation and maintenance of infrastructure leads to unacceptably high physical losses. Some municipalities have been able to reduce



their non-revenue water. In order to reduce non-revenue water, municipalities need to improve the operation and maintenance of their infrastructure; repair leaks; improve metering, billing, revenue collection, and debtor management; improve pressure management; and engage in community education and awareness; amongst other measures.

Conclusions

The Watch Reports indicate that there has been a decline in drinking water quality and an increase in non-revenue water since the last Drop reports were issued. The Green Drop Watch Report indicates that 50% of those municipalities whose waste water treatment systems were found to be in a critical state in the 2022 Green Drop report have failed to develop and implement plans to improve them.

To address these findings, the Department has issued compliance notices and directives to the relevant municipalities instructing them to correct the situation. Where the notices and directives are not acted upon, the Department institutes legal action against the municipality.

The Department is supporting and intervening in many municipalities across the country to improve water and sanitation services. The Minister has agreed on improvement plans with Mayors, and the Department is assisting the municipalities with grant funding to address infrastructure deficits. The Department and the Water Boards are also assisting the municipalities with technical expertise and management support.

The Department is in the process of strengthening its role as the regulator of water services. This includes developing more comprehensive and more stringent norms and standards for water service and standardising its regulatory processes so that it is more consistent with its regulatory actions.

The results of the 2023 Watch Reports indicate that legislative reforms may also be required to ensure that water service providers are professionally managed, capable, efficient and financially viable institutions. The Department is in the process of consulting with water sector stakeholders regarding such reforms.

The interim Watch Reports can be accessed on <https://ws.dws.gov.za/IRIS/latestresults.aspx>

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Issued by the Department of Water & Sanitation

For more information, contact Wisane Mavasa, Spokesperson for the Department of Water and Sanitation on 060 561 8935 / mavasaw@dws.gov.za or Kamogelo Mogotsi, Spokesperson for the Ministry on 076 523 0085.

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