



## MEDIA STATEMENT

### Release of the Full Blue and no Drop Reports, and the Green Drop Progress Assessment Report

05 December 2023

#### Introduction

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) has today, Tuesday 05 December 2023, released its 2023 full Blue Drop Report which provides an assessment of drinking water quality, and the full No Drop Report which focuses on water losses and non-revenue water in all municipalities in the country, as well as the Green Drop Progress Assessment Report to provide an update on the performance of wastewater management systems at municipal level.

The Blue, Green and No Drop Certification programmes are aimed at improving 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. Water services institutions that achieve excellence in providing such services are recognised. Owners of the infrastructure are provided with advice and guidance as to how to improve their water and sanitation services. The presentation accompanying the reports outlines the interventions that are being put in place to strengthen regulation and support to those municipalities struggling to provide services to national norms and standards.

As the water sector regulator in terms of both the National Water Act and Water Services Act, DWS introduced these incentive-based regulation programmes in 2008. In 2014, DWS stopped the programmes. The Minister of Water and Sanitation, Senzo Mchunu reintroduced the programmes in 2021. In 2022, DWS released a full Green Drop Report and Blue Drop and No Drop progress reports.

#### Summary of findings in the 2023 Blue Drop Report

The Blue Drop report is a comprehensive assessment of the state of all 958 water supply systems (WSS) in each of the 144 water services authorities (WSA) in the country. For each WSS, assessments are carried out of the condition of the infrastructure; 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.

Twenty six water supply systems scored more than 95% and qualified for the prestigious Blue Drop Certification. In 2014, 44 WSS were awarded Blue Drop status. This indicates an overall decline in excellence between 2014 and 2023.

Of the 958 WSS, 277 (29%) located in 62 WSAs were identified to be in a critical state of performance. In 2014, 174 WSS in 33 WSAs were found to be in a critical state of



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performance. This indicates that there has been an overall increase in the number of systems in a critical state of performance between 2014 and 2023.

Drinking water systems in the major metropolitan areas are generally performing well in terms of the Blue Drop key performance areas. Gauteng has the highest percentage of drinking water systems with excellent or good performance (62%), followed by Western Cape (50%). (The water supply disruptions which have been experienced in Gauteng in recent months are caused by the demand for treated water occasionally exceeding the available supply of treated water.)

Northern Cape has the highest percentage of drinking water systems with poor or critical performance (87%). This has deteriorated from 48% in 2014. The percentage of drinking water systems with poor or critical performance in Free State has also deteriorated markedly between 2014 (31%) and 2023 (59%).

Based on water quality tests carried out by municipalities themselves during the 2021/2022 municipal financial year, 54% of water supply systems achieved excellent or good microbiological water quality compliance, and 46% achieved poor or bad microbiological water quality compliance. In 2014, 5% of water supply systems achieved poor or bad microbiological water quality compliance. This indicates a severe regression in drinking water quality between 2014 and 2023. Drinking water quality is generally good in the major metropolitan areas.

When the tests carried out by a municipality indicate that drinking water poses a health risk, the municipality is obliged by law to inform its consumers that the quality of the water that it is supplying poses a health risk. DWS has sent non-compliance letters to the municipalities with systems which scored poorly or badly in terms of drinking water quality in the 2023 Blue Drop Report. These letters 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 legal requirements – residents should check with their municipalities if this is the case. The department provides monthly water quality data received from municipalities on its Integrated Regulatory Information System webpage that can be accessed at [ws.dws.gov.za/iris/mywater.aspx](http://ws.dws.gov.za/iris/mywater.aspx)

The Blue Drop assessment found that 85% of drinking water systems were in an average or better infrastructure condition. This indicates that non-infrastructure factors such as a lack of skilled staff or a lack of proper process controls are as important as infrastructure condition, if not more important, as contributors to poor performance. The assessment found that Gauteng has the lowest shortfalls of qualified staff, and that the Northern Cape has the highest shortfalls of qualified staff.

### **Summary of Findings in the 2023 No Drop Report**

The No Drop Programme assesses the degree to which the drinking water distribution systems of municipalities supply water efficiently, without wasting water. Four WSAs scored more than 90% and qualified for the prestigious No Drop Certification.



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The assessment found that national non-revenue water (NRW) increased from 37% in 2014 to 47% in 2023. This is caused by physical losses e.g., water leaking out of pipes above or underground, poorly functioning or non-existent water meters, illegal connections and poor billing and revenue collection. The international average for non-revenue water is 30%.

Average per capita water consumption nationally is approximately 218 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 county.

In order to reduce non-revenue water, municipalities need to improve 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.

### **Summary of Findings in the Green Drop Progress Assessment Report**

The Green Drop Progress Assessment report focuses on wastewater treatment works (WWTWs). It found that 64% of WWTW are at high or critical risk of discharging partially treated or untreated water into rivers and the environment. The number of WWTWs in the high- and critical-risk categories have both increased since 2013. This has negative environmental implications and poses risks to human health, e.g. cholera outbreaks are normally associated with wastewater pollution of water resources.

### **Conclusions**

The Blue and No Drop Reports indicate that there is has been a decline in drinking water quality and an increase in non-revenue water since the last reports were issued in 2014. The Green Drop Progress Assessment Report also indicates a deterioration in the performance of municipal waste water treatment systems.

DWS has requested WSAs with water or wastewater systems in a critical state to submit detailed corrective action plans to DWS and are offered support to produce these plans. The Minister and Deputy Ministers of Water and Sanitation spend most of their time crisscrossing the country visiting those municipalities with severe challenges with water and sanitation services, and DWS and Water Boards are supporting many of the municipalities to implement improvement plans agreed to by the Ministry and municipal leadership.

DWS works with COGTA, the Municipal Infrastructure Support Agency, the Department of Human Settlements, and National Treasury to provide support to the worst performing municipalities, including allocating infrastructure grants worth more than R20 billion per annum to municipalities, providing technical and engineering support and assistance, capacity building and training, and financial management advice and support.

However, despite all the support being provided to municipalities, the drop reports indicate that water services continue to decline and that fundamental reform is required to arrest and turn around the decline in municipal water and sanitation services. In this regard, DWS has



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recently gazetted the Water Services Amendment Bill for public comment. The Water Services Act distinguishes between the roles of Water Services Authority (WSA) and Water Services Provider (WSP) in municipalities. The WSA is the part of the municipality that is responsible for ensuring that water services are provided according to national norms and standards and the WSP is the part of the municipality which is responsible for providing the service. The Bill introduces a compulsory operating license system for WSPs, to be managed by DWS as the national regulator. This will enable WSAs to ensure that WSPs have minimum competency, capability, and performance levels in future.

The national reports and detailed provincial reports are available for download on <https://ws.dws.gov.za/iris/latestresults.aspx>

**Issued by the Department of Water & Sanitation**

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