



MEDIA STATEMENT

South Africa's plans for water security and provisioning of water and sanitation services for all

23 July 2024

In order to ensure water security, the government is focusing on investing in additional national water resource infrastructure, building awareness of the need to use water sparingly, and improving municipal water and sanitation services.

In the past, many of the Department of Water and Sanitation's projects have been subjected to unacceptable delays. However, in recent years the Department has made good progress in unblocking and accelerating the delayed projects.

There are currently 14 major national water resource infrastructure projects to a value of more than R100 billion in different stages of implementation around the country. Some examples of the projects which have been unblocked are the Lesotho Highlands Water Project Phase Two, the uMkhomazi Water Project and the raising of the wall of the Hazelmere Dam in KwaZulu Natal, the construction Ntabelanga Dam on the uMzimvubu River in the Eastern Cape, the raising of the wall of the Clanwilliam Dam in the Western Cape, the Giyani Water Supply Project in Limpopo and the Loskop Regional Bulk Water Supply Project in Mpumalanga and Limpopo. In addition to unblocking and accelerating these projects, Parliament recently passed the National Water Resource Infrastructure Agency Bill, which will result in the establishment of an agency with a balance sheet which will enable substantially more funds to be raised for investment in national water resource infrastructure.

Water supply disruptions in Gauteng and in eThekweni have increased in recent years and have resulted in much hardship for the residents of these areas. In both instances, the underlying problem is a shortage of water. The demand for water in both Gauteng and eThekweni has grown rapidly, largely due to population growth. The planners in the national department anticipated this growth in demand and planned major new national water resource infrastructure projects to meet it, but unfortunately in both cases the start of these projects was delayed.

However, the projects have been recently unblocked. The new Polihali Dam and associated infrastructure, which is part of Phase Two of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project, was due to be completed in 2019 to enable additional water to be supplied to the Integrated Vaal River System, which in turn is the main source of water for Gauteng. The start of the project was

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delayed by nine years. This project was unblocked, and the main contracts were all awarded in October 2022 and construction is now fully underway and is due to be completed by 2028.

Similarly, the start of the uMkhomazi project to supply additional water to eThekweni and surrounding municipalities was delayed by nine years, due to concerns about its affordability in terms of the tariffs that would have to be charged to the residents of eThekweni. The affordability problem was resolved in 2023 with the approval by National Treasury of an application by DWS, with the support of the Presidential Infrastructure Fund, for a blended finance solution for the funding of the project which made the tariff more affordable. This solution includes a 25% interest-free loan and a 25% grant from the national fiscus. This enabled the eThekweni Municipal Council to approve the water supply agreement on 31 January 2024, and the Department has now started to raise the finance for the project and to commence with implementation. Work has now begun on the design of the dam and tunnel for the uMkhomazi project.

The Department's project to raise the wall of the Hazelmere Dam to further increase water supply to the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality and surrounding areas in KwaZulu-Natal was started in 2011, but there were significant delays in implementation, including contractual disputes between the Department and the main contractor. The contract with the main contractor was terminated in 2018 resulting in a halt to the project. This was resolved in 2021 and the project was then completed in 2023.

The Ntabelanga Dam on a tributary of the uMzimvubu River in the Eastern Cape was planned to provide additional water for domestic and irrigation use and announcements regarding the construction of the dam were made in 2014. However, the start of construction was delayed for many years because the Department of Water Sanitation was unable to successfully motivate for a budget to be allocated to the project, because it was deemed to be too expensive in comparison to its economic and social benefits. The department resolved this blockage in 2023, by reconfiguring the project to reduce its cost while still providing the same benefits. The reconfiguration involved adopting a brown fields approach to water services infrastructure rather than the previous green fields approach (i.e. upgrading existing bulk water supply infrastructure rather than build new infrastructure). The reconfiguration of the project resulted in a decrease in the cost of the project from R18 billion to R8 billion, and National Treasury then agreed to fund the reconfigured project from the fiscus. As a result, site preparations and the process to obtain the license to construct the dam are currently underway and construction of the dam wall will commence by October 2024.

A project to raise the wall of the Clanwilliam Dam in the Western Cape, resulting in a tripling of the volume of water than can be stored in the dam was started in 2013. However, implementation of the project was severely delayed due to budget constraints and several changes in construction approach. As a result, very little construction work took place and by 2023 the project was only 10% complete. The delays have since been addressed, the project is now fully funded and major construction work is currently underway.

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The Department has also implemented a turnaround plan for the issuing of water use licences. This has resulted in an improvement in performance from 35% of applications being processed within 90 days to 70% being processed within 90 days. In addition, the backlog of more than a thousand applications was largely eradicated, such that there are now no more than 100 applications which have taken longer than 90 days to process, and these are completed as soon as possible. Further improvement towards the President's 2020 SONA target of processing all applications within 90 days will be achieved during this financial year.

One of the water services projects which has been notoriously delayed for many years, and which has been the subject of investigations by the Special Investigations Unit, is the Giyani Water Supply Project. The project started in 2014, but there were delays of seven years in its implementation. Over the last two years this project has been unblocked and accelerated. The main bulk pipeline from Nandoni Dam to Nsami Dam near Giyani was completed last year, and projects are currently underway to refurbish and increase the capacity of the Giyani Water Treatment Works and to install bulk reticulation lines, bulk reservoirs, service reservoirs and reticulation to households. Water has started to flow to households in nine of villages in Giyani and we will strive to ensure a further 15 villages receive water by the end of August this year, and that a further 31 villages receive water within the next two years.

The major Loskop Regional Bulk Water Supply project to increase water supply to Thembisile Hani Local Municipality in Mpumalanga and the Moutse-East area under the Sekhukhune District Municipality in Limpopo was originally planned to commence in 2019, but was delayed because of funding constraints and poor planning by the Department. This project has since been unblocked and construction started in 2022. The construction of a new bulk pipeline from Loskop Dam in Mpumalanga to Thembisile Hani Local Municipality and associated infrastructure is currently underway.

In addition to assisting municipalities to improve their water and sanitation infrastructure, the Department has proposed amendments to the Water Services Act, to address the poor municipal performance illustrated by the results of the Blue, Green and no Drop reports which were issued in December 2023. The Water Services Amendment Bill will be submitted to Cabinet shortly for approval for it to be tabled in Parliament.

Under the new administration, the Ministry and Department of Water and Sanitation are committed to continue to ensure that all of these projects are implemented expeditiously and without delay and that water and sanitation services are improved.

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For more information, contact Wisane Mavasa, Spokesperson for the Department of Water and Sanitation on 060 561 8935.

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