



MEDIA STATEMENT

Response to Sunday Times Article

09 September 2025

The Sunday Times article “Splashing out, Dry Taps as Water Boards drown in excess”, published on Sunday 7 September 2025, contains statements that represent a misleading picture of the seven water boards and the Trans Caledon Tunnel Authority (TCTA) and their governance.

The article stated that: *“Senior members of the country’s troubled water boards are earning almost R50m a year in board fees, with some pocketing as much as R100,000 per meeting....Some of the board members racked up travel and accommodation bills exceeding R200,000 per year....Some board members claim exorbitant fees for attending events such as staff funerals, ministerial gala dinners, imbizos, and union meet and greets.”*

The article is misleading for the following reasons.

1. The article gives the impression that individual senior board members may be earning up to R50m a year in board fees. This is incorrect. The maximum amount earned by a board member in the last financial year was R1.7m.
2. The statement in the article that some board members are *“pocketing as much as R100,000 per meeting”* is also misleading. This is based on information provided by DWS in its response to a National Assembly Question by Mr Visvin Reddy, a member of the Portfolio Committee on Water and Sanitation.

The parliamentary question asked for the total annual remuneration of board members. Board members are paid a meeting fee (hourly rate) for time spent in meetings of the board and its committees/sub-committees. In addition, Board members are paid a board fee (which is fixed, equal to 16 hours a month) to compensate them for time spent on preparation for meetings, research, and other official activities of the water board.

The figures provided by DWS to Parliament included both the meeting fees based on hourly rates and the fixed board fees for other official work. It is therefore incorrect to use these figures to calculate how much a board member claims per meeting, because the figures included remuneration for other work in addition to board meetings.

There are standard board meetings which normally take place every two months, as well as extraordinary board meetings, to deal with specific issues as they arise. Each board meeting is normally preceded by board subcommittee meetings.

The boards are the accounting authorities of the water boards and are required to perform their duties diligently. Board meetings can take up to two days and may require substantial preparatory work, including subcommittee meetings.



3. All board fees are determined in accordance with the DWS remuneration policy, developed through an independent comparative study of remuneration of boards in the public sector, and approved by the Minister. This policy is reviewed and adjusted annually in line with the Consumer Price Index.

Different hourly rates apply depending on the size of the Water Board. The hourly rate is determined by the size and annual budget of the water board using an internationally accepted and recognized grading and linked remuneration methodology. The hourly rates vary between R1818 per hour for the chairperson of a large water board to R1150 per hour for a board member of a small water board. These rates are much lower than the average rates paid to members of boards of comparatively sized companies in the private sector.

Most of the board members are professionals in fields such as finance, accountancy, law, engineering, and science. The hourly rates paid to board members are in line with the rates that the board members would charge if they were practising as professionals in their industries. For example, a senior professional accountant charges between R1500 and R2500 per hour.

4. The reference to board members being remunerated for attending “*staff funerals, ministerial gala dinners, imbizos, and union meet and greets*” is also misleading and gives a false impression of poor governance. Board members are frequently required to attend meetings organised by the Minister as well as meetings with provincial and municipal governments, including “imbizos”. Such meetings are required for purposes of monitoring, accounting, oversight, and stakeholder engagement and are necessary to fulfil the statutory mandates of the water boards. Board members may also occasionally be required to attend a “gala dinner” or a funeral of a staff member or a meeting with trade unions.
5. Sometimes board members engage in international travel to attend certain water conferences. This is beneficial because it enables board members to keep up to date with international developments in the sector and to build professional relationships. However, all international travel must be motivated and approved by the Minister, who often reduces the numbers of board members allowed to travel, in the interest of cost saving.
6. The total cost of all board’s fees combined is less than 0.1% of the Water Boards’ operational budget.

The water boards and TCTA have consistently achieved unqualified audits from the AGSA. This reflects sound governance and financial management. The consolidated actual revenue collected was R38.9 billion, which is higher than the projected revenue of R33.2 billion. This indicates an overall positive trend. This improvement in revenue collection can be attributed to better credit control measures, particularly by the larger Water Boards.

In the 2023/24 financial year, the combined assets value of all Water Boards surpassed R90 billion by reflecting the scale of investment in the sector. The asset values reflected in the 2023/24 financial year data indicate that Rand Water and UMngeni-uThukela Water continue to dominate among South Africa’s Water Boards. Their financial strength sets them apart significantly from the rest, underscoring their leading roles in the sector.



The resolution of South Africa's water service delivery challenges requires a wide range of actions, including by DWS, municipalities which are water services authorities, the private sector and the public. It is for this reason that the Department of Water and Sanitation held a National Water Indaba in March this year, bringing together all role players to develop a plan of action (see the Indaba declaration <https://www.dws.gov.za/wsindaba/declaration.aspx>).

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Issued by the Department of Water & Sanitation

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