



## water & sanitation

Department:  
Water and Sanitation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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### NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

### FOR WRITTEN REPLY

### QUESTION NO 2397

**DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 05 DECEMBER 2024**  
**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 26-2024)**

**2397. Ms N M Gasa (MK) to ask the Minister of Water and Sanitation:**

- (1) Whether, given the extensive reliance of the Republic on the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) for water and energy security, her department can justify the continued vulnerability of our critical infrastructure to maintenance delays and potential failures, especially when the six-month closure of the LHWP tunnel from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025 threatens to exacerbate water shortages and power generation issues in key regions; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (2) what concrete and enforceable measures will her department implement to ensure that the monitoring of the LHWP tunnel maintenance remains fully transparent and accountable, especially considering (a) previous failures in overseeing critical cross-border agreements and (b) her department's inadequate response to water security in underprivileged provinces?

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## MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION

- (1) The ongoing planned maintenance is being implemented in line with the operations and maintenance manuals of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP) tunnel system which require general inspections, and repair works to be conducted at 5 years intervals to ensure the integrity and reliability of the entire tunnel system. The last inspection was conducted in October 2019 and this major maintenance project currently underway is informed by the outcomes of the 2019 inspection reports.

This maintenance is critical for maintaining the integrity of the delivery tunnels as a tunnel failure would risk the transfer of 780 million m<sup>3</sup>/annum of water to the Integrated Vaal River System (IVRS), from which Rand Water draws water to supply its customers, including all the municipalities in Gauteng.

Measures were put in place to ensure successful execution of the tunnel maintenance work. This includes daily progress meetings with service providers, continuous monitoring of deviations against baseline schedules and the implementation of recovery plans to keep the project on track. The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) has appointed Mechanical and Electrical Contractors (one per Area Office) to augment internal capacity. These contractors assist during the implementation of maintenance projects.

The IVRS comprises 14 dams within the portions of Komati, Usutu, Thukela, Senqu in Lesotho and the upper Orange River. Over decades, the water resources of the Vaal River System were augmented to match the growing water requirements. In this regard, major inter-basin transfer schemes were developed to convey water into the system from the high rainfall regions of the upper Thukela and Usutu rivers as well as from the headwaters of the Orange River in the highlands of the Kingdom of Lesotho. Most of Eskom power stations are located within the Usutu sub-system which is not affected by the current LHWP tunnel closure. The hydro power generators that are affected by the Lesotho tunnel closure, were informed in August 2022 of the planned maintenance and arrangements were made with Eskom to this effect.

DWS conducted thorough analysis to assess the risk to the performance of the IVRS brought on by the tunnel closure and to determine its impact on water availability. The analysis confirmed that the impact of the tunnel closure on the overall IVRS will be minimal, considering that most dams in the IVRS are currently relatively full and water can be transferred from one system to

another, thereby assuring supply to water users. The Sterkfontein Dam functions as a reserve dam for the Vaal Dam and is currently relatively full.

(2)(a) A war room on the LHWP tunnel closure was established by the Minister to monitor weekly progress on all activities related to the tunnel closure and the state of water resources in the Free State and Gauteng. The team includes representatives from DWS, Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority (TCTA), Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA), South African Local Government Association (SALGA) and affected Municipalities.


- TCTA interfaces with LHDA on a weekly basis to ensure smooth coordination of the shutdown work.
- TCTA Executive Committee and Board provide oversight on the implementation of the shutdown work in the Republic of South Africa and through the Chairperson of the Board provides continuous feedback to the Minister on the status thereof.
- Lesotho Highlands Development Agency and Board provide oversight on the implementation of the shutdown work in the Kingdom of Lesotho and through the Lesotho Highlands Commission provides continuous feedback to DWS and TCTA. However, it should be noted that Lesotho is responsible for the maintenance on their side of the tunnel.
- TCTA interfaces with Lesotho Highlands Development Agency (LHDA) monthly to ensure smooth coordination of the tunnel maintenance work.
- TCTA developed a comprehensive risk response plan in order to quickly and efficiently deal with any risks that might materialize.
- The Minister interfaces with her counterpart in Lesotho to ensure the successful implementation of the shutdown work in Lesotho and South Africa.

(b) DWS holds weekly Wednesday meetings with the affected municipalities in the Free State to provide updates and track the progress of ongoing water augmentation projects within these municipalities, as well as to assess the current state of water resources in the province, including flow levels and the status of dams and reservoirs. These discussions have led to significant improvements in addressing critical water supply issues that could arise due to the closure of the LHWP tunnel.


There are also monthly stakeholder meetings that are coordinated by DWS where the municipalities and TCTA report to interested and affected stakeholders on the progress of their interventions and progress on the maintenance of the tunnel.

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DRAFT REPLY: RECOMMENDED/ ~~NOT RECOMMENDED/ AMENDED~~

  
**DR SEAN PHILLIPS**  
**DIRECTOR-GENERAL**  
**DATE:** 19/12/24 ✓

DRAFT REPLY: APPROVED/ NOT APPROVED/ AMENDED

  
**MISS PEMMY C.P. MAJODINA, MP**  
**MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION**  
**DATE:** 20-12-2024