

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF PROVINCES

FOR ORAL REPLY

QUESTION NO 2

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(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 4)

Mr C J van Rooyen to ask the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry:

- (1) Whether appropriate and sufficient (a) periodic regulatory audits of the water quality data and management systems of water services authorities (WSAs) are being conducted and (b) financial, scientific and technological resources are made available to WSAs to work on water quality issues; if not, why not, if so, what are the relevant details in each case;
- (2) whether, in light of outbreaks of health problems related to water quality, her department will seek alternatives to (a) actively engage or (b) force compliance on WSAs that do not comply with legislation governing water quality; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (3) what plans and strategies are in place to correct the poor quality of water in some Free State towns?

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REPLY:

(1)(a)& (b)

The question by the Member deals with drinking water quality. The quality of the tap water in South Africa, and especially in our cities, is excellent and well above the minimum safety standards. Our drinking water is treated to ensure that it complies with the national standard (SANS 241:2006) and South Africa has an excellent reputation in provision of safe drinking water. Compliance with this standard would mean that the water is safe for human consumption. The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry regulates compliance levels with the standards set and this intervention has seen a huge improvement in the way municipalities are performing in their responsibility to manage the quality of drinking water.

One of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry's most effective initiatives in the drinking water quality management domain was the development of an electronic water quality management system that has been supplied to all municipalities. The system provides regular and up-to-date drinking water quality information to DWAF and also allows managers in municipalities to have access to regular reporting on drinking water quality. This system is in use throughout the country; in January 2008 alone more than 3200 samples were taken from water supply systems across the country and the analyses recorded more than 94% compliance with the health aspects of the national standard. We

are in the process of extending this functionality to provide for waste water quality management as well.

From this monitoring DWAF are able to make rapid interventions before a problem with our drinking water arises and the Department works closely with the municipalities in question to resolve the situation. DWAF relies on the Municipalities to supply the data and the Department provides training on the use of the system. DWAF also conducts random audits of municipalities on the use of the system, in particular when the system identifies inconsistencies in the results. During these assessments the condition and operability of the treatment facility and process controllers would be assessed to inform any recommendations made to the municipality for implementation.

Municipalities would use their own financial resources to provide for operation and maintenance including water quality issues, and the less financially secure municipalities would receive funding for these areas of responsibility under the 'equitable share' allocation under Division of Revenue Act (DORA).

- (2)(a) The outbreak of health problems will always be regarded as a priority for turn-around by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, and this would be the driving force behind our endeavour to be more proactive in our regulatory approach to drinking water quality management.
- (2)(b) Where outbreaks unfortunately do occur, DWAF plays a leading role in the team who search for the cause and solution of the problem. If required a turn around plan is then drafted with due dates for rectifications which is strictly monitored throughout. It has been found that not all outbreaks are caused due to drinking water quality failures or due to human negligence. But where this is evidence then the Enforcement Protocol is used to ensure compliance is obtained soonest.
- (3) As in all parts of the country, DWAF works closely with Provincial Government to ensure that crucial issues such as adverse quality of drinking water (if it occurs), is urgently addressed. In the Free State a similar approach is being followed to ensure that practical planning will inform funding to be made available for the purpose of quality enhancement.