

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

FOR ORAL REPLY ON WEDNESDAY, 12 MARCH 2008

QUESTION NO 93

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★93. Mr M M Swathe (DA) to ask the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry:

Whether the country is facing a water shortage crisis or a water contamination crisis; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what steps is her department taking to address this matter?

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REPLY:

No. South Africa is not facing a water shortage crisis, nor do we face a water contamination crisis. During the statement that I made yesterday I gave a detailed response to these issues and in particular the concerns that I have regarding the pollution in some of our rivers. In your response to my statement you mentioned a proposal that the DA had sent to me, I would like to quote from the covering letter of that proposal where the DA spokesperson on Health said “it is true that problems are currently isolated and sporadic in nature.”

The challenge as was noted in that very same letter is that if we do not give attention to water issues problems will arise in the future.

I hope that through the statement made to this house yesterday I outlined the plans we have in place to ensure that we do not face water shortages as a result of poor planning, while also noting (1) we have strict water allocation processes, (2) the need to curb illegal abstraction of water, and (3) that South Africa is in a water scarce

region and we must always be water wise and protect our water resources. The frequency of rainfall over the country varies from year to year and from season to season, and there are years of drought just as there are times of flooding when rainfall is particularly intense.

In my statement yesterday I acknowledged the pollution we experience in some of our rivers and that I am very concerned about this pollution; and that we have now put measures in place to better deal with and respond to this problem, which requires the support of stakeholders and communities.

During my statement yesterday I had asked members to be careful of the facts that they used. When looking at the infrastructure challenges in the water sector – one must separate the infrastructure of my department – that of dams and canals; and the infrastructure of local government – that of reticulation to households and the waste water treatment plants. The honourable member from the DA cannot combine the costs of repair to both DWAF infrastructure and municipal infrastructure, and then only look at the budget of DWAF. While we would welcome more budget allocations to the sector one must certainly separate the items and look at what local governments, equitable share allocations, and MIG allocations are contributing towards water services infrastructure.