



## water & forestry

Department:  
Water Affairs and Forestry  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Reference: NA Q299

MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

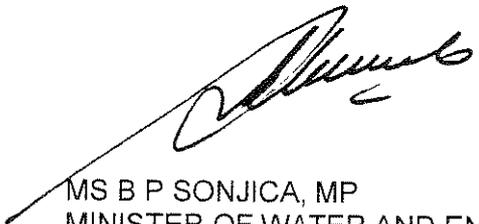
NATIONAL ASSEMBLY: QUESTION 299 FOR WRITTEN REPLY

A draft reply to the above-mentioned question asked by Mr G R Morgan (DA), is attached for your consideration, please.

  
Acting DIRECTOR-GENERAL

DATE: 09/07/2009

DRAFT REPLY APPROVED/AMENDED

  
MS B P SONJICA, MP  
MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

DATE: 10 July 2009

## NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

### FOR WRITTEN REPLY

#### QUESTION NO 299

DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 03 JULY 2009  
(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 5)

299. Mr G R Morgan (DA) to ask the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs:

- (1) Whether steps are being taken to warn water users about the risks of cyanobacteria in dams; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (2) whether warning signs are posted at the entrances to dams with dangerous levels of cyanobacteria; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (3) whether any legal action has been brought against her department for (a) not warning users about cyanobacteria or (b) not acting to ameliorate the presence of cyanobacteria; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (4) whether any studies have been conducted locally into the link between cyanobacteria and (a) Alzheimer's disease and (b) amyotrophic lateral sclerosis; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (5) whether she has been informed of studies elsewhere that suggest a link between cyanobacteria and these diseases; if so, what steps will she take in this regard?

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#### REPLY:

- (1) The Departmental website (specifically under Resource Quality Services) contains information on cyanobacterial blooms, identification thereof, how to avoid contact with contaminated water, how to treat water that may contain toxins and other relevant information that can be accessed by any member of the public. In addition, the National Eutrophication Monitoring Programme (NEMP) monitors the trophic status of 106 dams country-wide and the results are published in an annual eutrophic assessment report.

The implementation manual for this Monitoring Programme (NEMP) specifically states the development of a framework to enable an Early Warning System for algal (and specifically cyanobacterial) blooms as one of its objectives, and this has been attained at some dams, such as the Roodeplaat Dam and the Hartebeespoort Dam. The Department is committed to solve issues such as time delays between water analyses and the release of results, as well as the lack of formal communication structures, in order to ensure that this can be done for all dams where blooms frequently occur.

(2) To date, warning signs are being posted at two dams when cyanobacterial blooms occur, namely the Hartebeespoort Dam (North West) and the Nahoon Dam (Eastern Cape). However, several challenges exist in order to roll this out to other dams, including resistance from the local authorities or surrounding communities due to possible loss of revenue if dams can not be used for recreational activities.

(3)(a)  
and

(3)(b) The Department, is not aware of any legal action brought against it for not warning users about cyanobacteria or not acting to ameliorate the presence of cyanobacteria.

(4)(a)  
and

(4)(b) Although there are no known studies currently available within South Africa, several epidemiological studies were conducted in other parts of the world, such as Australia, United Kingdom, New Zealand and United States of America. There are evidence linking the toxins produced by these bacteria to adverse health effects in humans, but most of the research provides low levels of evidence, in that it does not take into account individual exposure, exposure levels and also does not include associated control groups.

Therefore, a significant amount of research is still required in order to confirm whether the presence of cyanotoxins does indeed cause diseases like Alzheimer's and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis. The Department is fully supportive of research in this area, and will use scientifically proven findings to inform policies and frameworks with regard to eutrophication.

(5) Refer to (4) above.