



## water & sanitation

Department:  
Water and Sanitation  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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### NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

### FOR WRITTEN REPLY

### QUESTION NO 3277

**DATE OF PUBLICATION IN INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 20 OCTOBER 2023**  
**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 36)**

#### **3277. Mrs M R Mohlala (EFF) to ask the Minister of Water and Sanitation:**

Considering the environmental impact of the depletion of underground water sources due to water sources being overutilised by gum plantations owned by Sappi, which disadvantages communities living in and around the plantations, how does his department monitor and/or oversee the use of water so that the usage of water is not skewed in favour of large corporations such as Sappi?

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#### **MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION**

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) manages use of water resources by commercial afforestation where this activity is declared as engaging in a streamflow reduction activity (SFRA) as contemplated in s36(1) of the National Water Act, 1998 (Act 36 of 1998) (NWA) from the water use authorisation process. Upon receipt of a water use licence application for s21(d) water use (SFRA), the Department undertakes technical assessment to estimate the impacts associated with the activity on the water resource and any decision to issue a water use licence is based on sustainable water availability. The application must satisfy the requirements of the Reserve, both ecological and basic human needs, and where a water use licence is granted, conditions are attached to ensure that efficiency, equity, and sustainability in the use of water resources are promoted throughout the project's lifetime.

The impact of commercial forestry plantations on surface water resources has been researched extensively, and impact assessment tools have been developed and are being applied in the water use authorisation processes. However, in recent decades, researchers have also shown interest of studying the impact of commercial forestry plantations on


groundwater resources. These studies show that commercial afforestation trees may influence evapotranspiration rates and deep roots, lowering groundwater water tables. These studies make recommendations which are considered in the authorisation process.

The other factors considered when authorising a water use for commercial forestry plantations are found in s27(1) of the NWA, where factors, including the need to redress the results of past racial and gender discrimination, and efficient and beneficial use of water in the public interest are considered. These factors ensure that when allocating water resources, the principle of fair allocation is considered for equitable water allocation.


Water use authorisation instruments issued by the Department are continuously monitored for compliance by the Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement component of the Department to ensure that water users comply with the conditions attached to their water use entitlements and any best management practices (SFRA best management practices) recommended for the sector. Compliance is assessed via the auditing process and corrective actions are addressed as enabled by the NWA.

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

  
**DR SEAN PHILLIPS**  
**DIRECTOR-GENERAL**  
DATE: 26/10/23

DRAFT REPLY: APPROVED/ ~~NOT APPROVED~~/ ~~AMENDED~~

  
**MR SENZO MCHUNU, MP**  
**MINISTER OF WATER AND SANITATION**  
DATE: 31/10/23