



MEDIA STATEMENT

The Drought Situation and Long-term Planning for Sustainable Water Supply to the KwaZulu-Natal Coastal Metropolitan Area

27 March, 2015

Currently a large portion of KwaZulu-Natal is experiencing drought conditions as a result of below-average rainfall over the past year. In some areas growing water demands already far exceed available water resources, a situation which has been masked by good rainfall in previous years.

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS), as the custodian of water resources in South Africa, is responsible for the planning of water resources across the country. This includes the development and implementation of Reconciliation Strategies to monitor and plan the various interventions required to reconcile water availability and growing water requirements. This is vital to ensure that the impact of drought conditions is effectively managed and mitigated in future.

The Reconciliation Strategy for the KwaZulu-Natal Coastal Metropolitan Area focuses on the economic hub of the province, including Durban, the North and South Coast from Zinkwazi to Mtwalume, as well as the inland areas of Pietermaritzburg and Howick. The Strategy Steering Committee (SSC) whose members are drawn from DWS, Umgeni Water, eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, various industries, district and local municipalities and other stakeholders, is responsible for directing the continued updating, monitoring and implementation of the Strategy.

At the seventh SSC on 25 February 2015, progress was discussed of the implementation of a number of key short, medium, and long-term resource infrastructure projects to meet expected water needs. These include:

- *The recent completion of Spring Grove Dam which brings the Mgeni Supply System back into balance.*

- *The first phase of the Lower Thukela scheme, which should be completed early in 2016, to augment supply to the North Coast and relieve the water shortages currently experienced in that area.*
- *The raising of Hazelmere Dam and a second phase of the Lower Thukela scheme, which are required as soon as possible for further long-term sustainable water supply to the North Coast.*
- *Feasibility Studies are currently being undertaken by Umgeni Water to ensure that growing water requirements in the upper and middle South Coast areas are met. These include the possible desalination of seawater or the implementation of an off-channel storage dam in the uMkhomazi River catchment. Augmentation of the South Coast is required by 2018.*
- *The first phase of the proposed uMkhomazi Water Project (uMWP1) appears to be the most attractive option for ensuring that the longer-term water requirements of the Mgeni Water Supply System are satisfied. Initial estimates indicate that the project could be commissioned by 2023. Any delays will increase the necessity of developing smaller options that can be implemented quickly (such as seawater desalination on the North Coast and/or the re-use of treated effluent), perhaps at significant additional cost.*

The SSC recognises that the construction of new, very expensive water resource infrastructure is only part of the solution to satisfy long-term water needs. A high level of emphasis is therefore placed on a drive, in cooperation with water services providers and authorities in the region, to increase the efficiency of water use through ongoing water conservation and water demand management (WC/WDM) initiatives. To ensure its success, however, WC/WDM must be viewed as more than simply a series of technical interventions. It depends heavily on social perceptions and behaviours and strong public support. Other initiatives such as the harvesting of rainwater could also play an important future role in supporting future water supply, particularly for new developments.

To address the short-term drought challenges in the province emergency relief work is already underway. Within the focus area of the Strategy this includes a functioning emergency scheme at uMzinto to support the South Coast from the Mpanpanyoni River, as well as a scheme currently under construction on the North Coast to support Hazelmere Dam from the Tongati River.

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