

MEDIA STATEMENT

KwaZulu-Natal Coastal Metropolitan water reviewed

11 November 2014

The possibility of building of two desalination plants on the north and south coast to augment water availability in Durban and surrounding areas was discussed at a recent review of future water for the area.

At a Reconciliation Strategy for the KwaZulu-Natal Coastal Metropolitan Areas review meeting by the Strategy Steering Committee (SSC) whose members are drawn from the Department of Water and Sanitation, Umgeni Water, eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality, various industries and district and local municipalities – it was reported that the desalination of water at Tongaat and Illovo is considered to be a realistic potential additional source of potable in the medium term – together with other options such as the direct re-use, after-treatment to potable water standards, of effluent from urban areas.

The construction of Spring Grove Dam in 2013 was a key resource development intervention in the Reconciliation Strategy. Good rains over the season that started in October 2013 meant that by April 2014 the dam was already 80% full and additional water can soon be transferred to Midmar Dam near Pietermaritzburg. This has lowered the risk of water shortages, and the possible need for restrictions, in the areas supplied by the Mgeni water supply system. There is, however, still much to be done to meet expected water needs in the long-term.

The Reconciliation Strategy envisages other short, medium, and long-term resource development projects to meet the expected water needs. The Lower Thukela Bulk Water Supply Scheme implemented by Umgeni Water, which



will abstract water from the Thukela River near Mandini, is now under construction and is expected to be completed by 2016. The scheme will augment the water supplies now available from the Mvoti River and from Hazelmere Dam on the Mdloti River for users along the North Coast of KZN. Plans are also in place to increase the storage capacity of Hazelmere Dam, and hence the yield from that source, by 2018. Umgeni Water is already expanding their Hazelmere Water Treatment Works in anticipation of the increased availability of raw water at this source. These are good examples of cooperative governance in practice.

It was reported that "The desalination of seawater on the North Coast at Tongaat and on the South Coast near Illovo is considered to be a realistic additional source of potable water in the medium-term, together with other options such as the direct re-use, after treatment to potable water standards, of effluent from urban areas".

The first phase of the proposed uMkhomazi Water Project (uMWP1) appears to be the most attractive option for ensuring that the longer-term water needs of the region are satisfied. Initial estimates indicate that the uMWP1, which includes the proposed Smithfield Dam on the uMkhomazi River, a 32.5 km transfer tunnel and a balancing dam at Baynesfield Estate, could be commissioned by 2023.

Any delays in the commissioning of the uMWP1 beyond 2023, will increase the necessity of developing smaller options that can be implemented quickly (such as seawater desalination and/or re-use of water), perhaps at significant additional cost. The major uMWP1 water resource development project would increase the availability of potable water in the region to satisfy expected water needs to beyond 2040.

The DWS has carried out extensive public participation and awareness programmes in the uMWP project area. The active participation of many



interested and affected parties, representing a vast array of sectors and social spheres, has yielded positive results in the form of awareness and understanding of the main issues.

The SSC recognises that 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. Municipalities such as the eThekwini Metro have been successful in introducing several measures to manage water use, to reduce losses and to improve water use efficiency. These examples must be replicated elsewhere in the region. However, WC/WDM is more than simply a series of technical interventions and its success is also impacted upon by social perceptions and behaviours and requires strong public support.

Equally important as the effective use of our severely limited water resources is the preservation of river catchments to supply these resources on a sustainable basis. The uMngeni Ecological Infrastructure Partnership (UEIP), launched through a partnership between SANBI, eThekwini Municipality, Umgeni Water, the DWS and many other organisations, is strongly supported by the SSC. This programme will focus on maintaining and restoring the ecological infrastructure in the catchment which is vital for the sustainable availability of water resources for the area.



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