**2025 WATER AND SANITATION INDABA**

**“WATER SECURITY AND PROVISION”**

**HIGH LEVEL DECLARATION AND RESOLUTIONS**

**Gallagher Convention Centre, Midrand, Gauteng**

**28 March 2025**

**1. INTRODUCTION**

1.1 The Water and Sanitation Indaba was attended by 800 delegates, drawn from national government and national entities, provincial government, local government, SALGA, the private sector, and water and sanitation experts.

1.2 It was held over two days (27 and 28 March 2025) in Gallagher Estate in Gauteng.

1.3 The Indaba received a key-note address from His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa; as well as inputs by the Deputy President of SALGA, Councillor Xola Pakadi; the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Velinkosini Hlabisa; the Minister of Water and Sanitation, Pemmy Majodina; and a progress report by the Director General of Water and Sanitation, Dr Sean Phillips. The Inaba was closed by His Excellency Deputy President Paul Mashatile.

1.4 The Indaba took place during Human Rights Month when we celebrate the progress we have made in giving effect to the Bill of Rights in the Constitution.

1.5 As indicated by the President in his address to the Indaba, “*These rights, including the right of access to sufficient food and water, are interrelated and interdependent. At their center is the most fundamental right of all, the right to human dignity*”.

1.6 The Indaba reaffirmed that access to clean water and safe sanitation are enshrined in our Constitution and other laws as the most basic human need for health and well-being.

1.7 It also noted that the demand for water in some areas has been rising exponentially owing to rapid population growth and urbanization; increasing water needs from industry; and the need to make provision for international obligations.

1.8 Most of our communities and sectors are already experiencing widespread water and sanitation delivery failures and a lack of responsiveness, including water insecurity, scarcity, intermittent supply or no supply at all.

1.9 Based on the DWS 2023 full Blue Drop and 2022 full Green Drop assessments, Minister Majodina has identified 105 out of the 144 water services authorities that are experiencing a water service delivery crisis. This failure has contributed to the trust deficit in the sector. These municipalities are unable to discharge their constitutional responsibilities in a number of areas, including basic service delivery and the management of critical infrastructure like water treatment plants and waste water treatment plants.

1.10 To address this, the President said that: “*For its part, local government leadership needs to prioritise turnaround strategies for their respective Water Services Authorities.*”

1.11 The Indaba was informed by the conclusion reached by the President in his recent State of the Nation Address, that water is our immediate crisis and that our top priority is to ensure water security and reliable water and sanitation services for the benefit of all.

1.12 The Indaba recognized that, as a country we have made progress in providing access to a basic level of water services, which currently stands at 90% and 84.9% of households nationally for water and sanitation respectively. As indicated by the President, “*as a country we can be proud of the progress we have made in fulfilling this basic right of our people since the advent of democracy*.”

1.13 The Indaba recognized that, while South Africa is ranked amongst the 30 driest countries globally, the average consumption of water per capita per day is 218 l/c//d, compared to the international average of 173 l/c/d. This is not sustainable.

1.14 The Indaba followed the directive by the President that: “*What is needed is course correction - a comprehensive plan that will expand access to water and sanitation services, improve the quality of water and sanitation infrastructure, and bring stability and good governance to all the entities involved in South Africa’s water stewardship*.”

1.15 The President also emphasized the need for collaboration: “*There needs to be greater cooperation between national and provincial government, the water resource management entities, and the private sector to support the turnaround in water stewardship*”.

1.16 The President further emphasized that: “*The people of South Africa look to this Water and Sanitation Indaba with hope, and for a clear strategy and plan on how to uphold their dignity through the provision of water and sanitation services that are their basic right. We also look to this Indaba for a clear vision for ensuring South Africa’s water security well into the future”*.

1.17 The Indaba was held under the theme of “Water Security and Provision”.

1.18 The purpose of the Indaba was to seek consensus on:

1. Delivery/ implementation models
2. Increasing investment through financing options and ensuring the financial viability of the sector
3. Enhancing and strengthening technical and operational capacity and efficiency
4. Building partnerships through building water sensitive and resilient communities
5. Fighting criminality and corruption in the water and sanitation sector

**2.** **CONTEXT**

2.1 South Africa’s national water balance until 2030 remains in balance but there are localized deficits. However, water availability in South Africa could deteriorate as supply contracts and demand escalates due to:

* + - economic growth, urbanisation and population growth
		- inefficient use (particularly losses in municipal distribution systems)
		- degradation of wetlands
		- sewage pollution and industrial pollution
		- the impacts of climate change.

2.2 It is projected that water scarcity will increase due to the impact of climate change. This demands better infrastructure planning, financing, implementation and management. Agility is required through climate change mitigation strategies.

2.3 Our water quality is also deteriorating due to pollution, particularly sewage pollution by municipalities, resulting in polluted rivers and damaged ecosystems, as well as sewage spillages directly into communities.

2.4 Delays in the implementation of surface water resource development projects in the past have now been addressed - projects that were blocked for many years (such as LHWP2 and the uMkhomazi Water Project) are now in the implementation phase. Establishment of the NWRIA will enable more finance to be raised on the markets for national water resource infrastructure projects.

2.5 The establishment of wall-to-wall Catchment Management Agencies will result in improved management of water catchments, which is key to increasing raw water security – all six have been gazetted and the Boards have been appointed.

2.6 Broadening of South Africa’s water resource mix is critical for water security – because the potential to further develop its surface water resources is limited – we are already harnessing approximately 75% of our sustainably utilizable surface water resources. We need to diversify the water resource mix by increasing the sustainable use of groundwater; desalination of sea water; and capturing return flows from treated waste-water systems (water re-use) as well as reuse of other poor-quality water such as acid mine drainage.

2.7 Supply-side measures are necessary but not sufficient to avoid future water deficits - water conservation and water demand management must also be implemented more effectively, particularly in domestic and general industrial use, and by reducing physical losses in municipal distribution systems.

2.8 There has been a severe decline in the reliability of the services provided. This has been caused by a variety of factors, including under investment in maintenance and renewal of infrastructure and a lack of appointment of staff with the required qualifications. This has resulted in a decline in the national average for reliability to 68%, non-revenue water of 48% and deteriorating water quality in about 60% of water supply systems.

2.9 The findings of the DWS Drop reports are supported by reports of the Department of Cooperative Governance, National Treasury, research institutions, and the Auditor General of South Africa. These reports indicate that a large proportion of municipalities do not have the capability to discharge their mandates with respect to governance and service delivery .

2.10 The state of water and sanitation delivery has been worsened by a plethora of issues, including organised criminality and malfeasance. This includes attacks on critical water and energy infrastructure, corruption, weak financial management, poor credit control, inaccurate billing, illegal connections, infrastructure decay and governance instability.

2.11 To reverse the decline in water services, we need a whole-of-society approach with a turnaround plan that will ensure sector-wide investment and capacity building, promote innovation and evidence-based actions, enhance cross-sectoral coordination and cooperation amongst stakeholders; and result in an integrated approach to water resources and water services planning and management.

**3.** **RESOLUTIONS**

The Indaba agreed that we should work together and hold each other accountable for our actions and commitments; increase investment on water research and development and technological transfer; recognise the existing body of knowledge including indigenous systems; and promote the inclusion of women, youth and people with disabilities in water and sanitation.

We therefore committed ourselves to the following resolutions taken and agreed upon in the Water and Sanitation Indaba, to turn around the water sector:

**1. Resolutions related to delivery/ implementation models**

1.1 DWS to complete the full establishment of the National Water Resource Infrastructure Agency by mid-2026

1.2 DWS to complete the full establishment of Catchment Management Agencies by July 2025

1.3 All WSAs to implement a utility model for water and sanitation to ensure operational efficiency without losing municipal ownership, within three years (a utility can be a ring-fenced internal department, municipal entity, water board, special purpose vehicle, or concession, amongst other options)

1.4 SALGA, COGTA and DWS to implement the plan that has been developed for a coordinated Municipal Systems Act Section 78 consultative process according to the timeframes in the plan. This should lead to the appointment of capable Water Service Providers

1.5 As part of good governance and compliance with the law, all WSAs to separate their WSA and WSP functions and account for them separately within a year (Council resolutions in this regard should be taken within three months)

1.6 All metropolitan municipalities to implement the Reform of Metropolitan Trading Services Programme - establish or appoint ring-fenced, professionally managed utilities (internal or external) for water & sanitation within two years, with support from National Treasury and line departments

1.7 COGTA to review the current institutional structure of local government, including the appropriateness of the two-tier system, following which COGTA to review the allocation of WSA status to municipalities

1.8 DWS to finalise Water Services Act amendments and table to Parliament by May 2025. Following this, DWS to put in place an operating licensing system for Water Services Providers by June 2026

1.9 DWS to provide guidance to WSAs on the different options for external WSPs, on request from April 2025

1.10 DWS to issue guidelines on the roles and functions of WSAs versus WSPs by April 2025

1.11 DWS and AWSISA to develop a plan for building Water Boards’ capacity and readiness to provide a retail WSP function to WSAs if requested, informed by a capacity assessment of the Water Boards, by end July 2025

1.12 National Government (Presidency, National Treasury, COGTA and DWS), working with SALGA, to review the intervention and support model for local government in terms of Section 154 and 139 of the Constitution and Section 63 of the Water Services Act, within two years

1.13 DWS to finalise amendments to National Water Act and submit to Parliament within 6 months, including legislating the use-it-or-lose it principle for water use licenses

**2.** **Resolutions related to increasing investment through financing options and ensuring the financial viability of the sector**

2.1 All government departments to pay correct invoices from municipalities within three months and municipalities to apply stringent credit control measures on government departments that do not pay

2.2 All WSAs to pay their current invoices in full to the Water Boards timeously, immediately

2.3 All Water Boards to pay their current invoices in full to DWS, starting immediately

2.4 DWS and water boards to implement the approved debt write-off mechanism with qualifying municipalities, starting immediately

2.5 National Treasury to finalise the review of the funding model for local government

2.6 DWS to implement the revised Raw Water Pricing Strategy by 1 April 2026

2.7 DWS to establish an independent economic water regulator to regulate water prices across the water value chain, within three years

2.8 All WSAs/WSPs which do not yet have non-revenue water programmes, to have these in place by May 2025, covering:

* Budgets for maintenance and for reducing leaks in water distribution systems
* Ensuring that all reported leaks are fixed quickly
* Closing illegal water connections
* Replacing old leaking pipes, including asbestos pipes (which are a danger to health)
* Improving management of water systems (through pressure management for example)
* Strengthening metering, billing and revenue collection, including ensuring that billing systems are accurate.

2.9 All WSAs which have not yet ringfenced revenues from the sale of water for the water function to take resolutions to their Councils in this regard within 6 months

2.10 DWS to arrange provincial workshops with all WSAs in each province to develop a common understanding of what is meant by “ringfencing”

2.11 All WSAs to review their indigent registers and ensure the provision of free basic water to the indigent within two years. All other water users to be billed and revenue to be collected from all other users

2.12 WSAs or WSPs to consider partnerships with the private sector, drawing on the support of the Water Partnerships Office, starting immediately

2.13 DWS and the Water Partnerships Office to develop Green and Blue Bond financing mechanisms with the private sector, for implementation by Catchment Management Agencies and WSAs, starting immediately

2.14 DWS, the Water Boards and WSAs to increase their collaboration with the Infrastructure Fund to put in place more blended finance water projects, over the next three years

2.15 DWS and the Water Boards to develop additional non-commercial water provision partnerships with industrial sectors, such as the Olifants Management Model project in Limpopo with mining houses, starting immediately

2.16 DWS to develop mechanisms to leverage private sector finance using the Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant and Water Services Infrastructure Grant, to be in place by the 2026/27 financial year

2.17 DWS and COGTA to engage with National Treasury to review water and sanitation conditional grants with a view to addressing the challenge of maintenance of water and sanitation infrastructure, within six months

**3. Resolutions related to enhancing and strengthening technical and operational capacity and efficiency**

3.1 All WSAs which have not yet submitted Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) to address their Drop report results to submit to DWS by end of May 2025

3.2 DWS to verify all reports submitted by WSAs of progress against the January 2024 Summit resolutions, within 4 months

3.3 All WSAs which have not yet started implementation of the CAPs to do so by June 2025

3.4 DWS to monitor implementation of the CAPs and escalate to political leaders where necessary

3.5 All WSAs to put in place plans to reduce demand, through communications campaigns and stakeholder engagements aimed at behaviour change, water restrictions and tariffs and technical interventions such as flow restrictors, pressure management and leak reduction, within a year

3.6 All WSAs to implement leak detection and repair programmes to improve reliability through improving leak repair turnaround times; prioritizing the leaks which result in the highest losses, while fixing other leaks; and costing and implementing a programme of pipe replacement so that infrastructure remains within its design life

3.7 WSAs with demand for water exceeding available supply to consider putting in place and enforcing water restrictions, and step-tariffs or punitive tariffs for high-volume non-industrial users, with immediate effect

3.8 All WSAs/WSPs which do not yet have water conservation and demand management programmes in place to have these in place by May 2025

3.9 All WSA to put in place climate change and disaster response plans within a year

3.10 Any Water Services Authorities which are not yet issuing advisory notices without fail when their drinking water quality fails to meet drinking water standards must do so immediately

3.11 Water and sanitation infrastructure grants to WSAs must be refocused on increasing access to a basic level of services, starting in the 2025/26 financial year

3.12 All WSPs to ensure that asset management plans are in place, including maintenance plans, within a year

3.13 All WSAs to ensure that their maintenance and repairs teams have the necessary tools of trade, within two years

3.14 All WSAs/WSPs to implement the local government professionalization framework, in terms of timeframes set by the Department of Cooperative Governance

3.15 DWS to develop minimum competency regulations for water service providers and water services authorities and issue them by end of 2026 financial year

3.16 COGTA to review municipal staff regulations to align them with the reforms taking place in the water sector

3.17 All WSAs to prioritise creation and filling of key technical positions (process controllers, artisans, scientists and engineers) on an ongoing basis

3.18 All WSA’s to review their bylaws with regard to enforcement of water and sanitation policies in line with national norms and standards, and address gaps within the next year

3.19 All CMAs to finalise Catchment Management Strategies within a year, including dealing with erosion and silting of dams, which reduce dam capacity

3.20 DWS will finalise the revised National Water Resource Strategy within the timeframes set by the National Water Act.

**4. Resolutions related to building partnerships through building water sensitive and resilient communities**

4.1 DWS, water boards and WSAs to work with business and civil society leaders to raise awareness of the need to use water sparingly, starting immediately, drawing lessons from the success stories of collective action in averting water crises in the cities of Cape Town and Nelson Mandela Bay

4.2 DWS to implement a communications and awareness campaign regarding the need to use water sparingly, in collaboration with business and civil society leaders and all spheres of government, starting immediately

4.3 DWS to explore incentives for the agriculture sector and other sectors to use less water (such as through using efficient/precision irrigation systems) – proposals to be developed and submitted to Cabinet system within 6 months

4.4 WSAs to work with local business and civil society leaders to address water and sanitation challenges, drawing on the lessons of the successful Presidential Business Working Group in eThekwini, on an ongoing basis

**5**. **Resolutions related to fighting criminality and corruption in the water and sanitation sector**

5.1 All WSAs that have not yet developed an infrastructure security strategy/ plan to combat vandalism and theft of water and sanitation infrastructure to have these in place within 6 months

5.2 DWS to collaborate with Special Investigating Unit to establish a national water and sanitation anti-corruption forum, within 6 months

5.3 WSAs to implement community education and awareness programmes to raise the implications of theft and vandalism on water infrastructure, starting within the next 6 months

5.4 WSAs to consider establishing water committees to protect water and sanitation infrastructure, within a year

**4.** **CONCLUSIONS**

4.1 As indicated by the President, “*Structural reforms in the water sector, as vital as they are, cannot be effectively implemented without local government being strengthened*”.

4.2 These resolutions form the basis of a concrete response turn-around plan as espoused through the District Development Model.

4.3 For these resolutions to be achieved, there must be greater collaboration between government, civil society, the private sector, water experts, and water research institutions to support the turn-around.

4.4 On this basis of this agreed-to plan, Government will embark on a process of consultation with all stakeholders, including organisations of civil society and traditional leadership.

4.5 Government will take a ‘Whole of Society Approach’ to addressing water challenges – making the imperatives of water security and ensuring sustained provision to be “everybody’s business”, drawing on the lessons from the Presidential Working Group for eThekwini.

4.6 Government will endeavour to cultivate informed and engaged water citizens and empower residents, labour, civil society, NGOs, and other sectors like private sector to work with government to make a difference.

4.7 We will work together and hold each other accountable for our actions and commitments; increase investment on water research and development, technological transfer, recognition of existing body of knowledge including indigenous systems whilst promoting inclusion of women, youth and people with disabilities in water and sanitation.

4.8 We pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, to implement all the concrete plans and reforms set out here, to ensure that citizens experience better water security and services.

4.9 The contribution to the Water and Sanitation Indaba of the exhibitors in sharing the body of research, technologies and solutions is greatly appreciated, as well as the contribution of all the water entities and sponsors of the event.