

Launch of the Bloemdal Bulk Pipeline Project
Speech by Mrs LB Hendricks Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry
Delmas Local Municipality
30 October 2008

Good day, Lotshani, Goeie dag.

Programme Director
MEC Mashego-Dlamini
Honourable Mayor
Councillors
Chairperson of Rand Water
Distinguished Guests
Departmental and other Government Officials
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to be here on this important occasion to inaugurate the Delmas potable water treatment project and to sign an agreement to build a pipeline to transport water from Bloemendal to Delmas.

The first time I came to Delmas as Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry the news was not good; it was exactly one year ago where there was an outbreak of diarrhoea where over one thousand three hundred people became ill. While the task team and the extensive investigation that was conducted could not conclusively point to water as the problem, we identified that there were several challenges with the water in Delmas that needed to be addressed. The challenges we identified were firstly, problems with one of the boreholes supplying water to the town and the chlorination of the water, and secondly problems with the water in the river due to effluent from industry as well as problems with the treatment of waste water.

We intervened immediately by supporting the Municipality and deploying a team of engineers and water quality experts, we were then able to reassure the citizens of Delmas that the tap water was fit for consumption. These were emergency measures and since then together with the Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Local Government, the Delmas Municipality and Rand Water we have been working on longer term measures to ensure that now and in future the water quality of both the tap water and the water in river are at the right standards. These measures, as we have heard already, are (1) the construction of two potable water treatment plants, these plants are currently working and as from 1 June 2008 approximately 10 000 Delmas residents were served with clean and purified water. (2) The cleaning and testing of the 18 boreholes in the area, which once completed will further augment the water supply to the Delmas area. (3) The construction of the water pipeline to bring water from Bloemendal to Delmas. The pipeline is expected to cost an estimated R85 million; and Rand Water, the Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Local Government, the Delmas Local Municipality and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry will all contribute to the funding of the pipeline. Construction of the pipeline is expected to take 24 months.

As part of our measures to improve the water situation in Delmas we are extending the operations of Rand Water into the Delmas Municipality. Rand Water has been providing safe drinking water to municipalities throughout Gauteng for over 100 years and I am confident that they will ensure that the water provided to the citizens of Delmas is of the highest standards.

The problem of the quality of water in the river is being addressed through cleaning of the river, reducing the pollution into the river and upgrading of the waste water treatment plant (sewage plant) so that the water being released into the river is of the required standard. I would like to acknowledge the contribution of the Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Local Government for their support of the municipality in upgrading the sewage plant. I have personally been involved in efforts to address the pollution in the river. Earlier this year, during the National Water Week, I visited Delmas – I put on boots and protective clothing and helped clear the river myself. I also went to the chicken abattoir to issue a directive to the owner to say that if they do not stop polluting the river we will be forced to shut down their operation.

So today, ladies and gentlemen, we are back in Delmas with good news to show what has been done, and I am confident that as a result of all of our efforts we will have greatly reduced the possibility that we will see an outbreak of diarrhoea that we witness last year and in 2005. Through these efforts we are saying that as the government we take the issue of water quality very very seriously. As the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry in South Africa it is my responsibility to ensure that we have tap water that is clean and meets the required (high) standards. South Africa is known internationally as one of the few countries where it is safe to drink water from the tap and we are committed to keeping our standards high. We are strengthening our regulatory unit within the

department to monitor and enforce the drinking water quality standards. A few weeks ago I announced that as part of these efforts we are going to be issuing Blue Drop certificates to municipalities that meet the standards so that the communities and visitors have confidence in the quality of the tap water. We are also issuing Green Drop certificates to those municipalities that meet the requirements on treatment of waste water.

Programme Director, having good quality drinking water without a tap does not help. It has been one of the successes of our government since 1994 to supply 18.7 million more people access to water, and in partnership with Provincial Government and municipalities we are on track to ensure the remaining households without access to water are serviced. We are working with municipalities to assist them in meeting their constitutional responsibility of reticulation of water and sanitation services, and saying to them that they should develop concrete action plans to progressively achieving the target of universal access to water and sanitation.

Within Delmas we are aware that over ten thousand people are still without access to clean water; and it is a priority to eradicate that backlog so people are not forced to collect untreated water from the river. The water treatment plant and the agreement we are signing today will contribute to our efforts to reducing this backlog.

Honourable Mayor, councillors, one of the impacts of our efforts including the new 34 kilometre pipeline that is being constructed, the cleaning of the boreholes, the improvement of the quality of the water in the river and the supply of water and sanitation to households, is that there will be more water, better water, and improved infrastructure for the development and the future growth of the town. Ladies and Gentlemen, my department sees water as a critical tool to contribute towards economic growth and we must see how to use this scarce and precious resource to its maximum benefit. Water is also being seen as a tool in the anti-poverty campaign through the growing of food gardens and upliftment of households. It is therefore necessary for all of us to manage this resource carefully; to protect our rivers, dams and streams; and not to waste water. The contribution of water to development will however not happen on its own and it requires concerted efforts by communities working with private sector and government to identify the opportunities and work towards achieving them.

Ladies and gentlemen, to conclude, today is one of those occasions that makes one feel a sense of pride and achievement that our collaborative efforts between all spheres of government, government institutions, private sector and the communities we serve can yield tangible results.

The Government is committed to creating a better life for our people including ensuring that the people of Delmas receive clean and adequate water supply, and today we see real results arising from that commitment.

I thank you