

5th World Water Forum

High-Level Panel on Water and Climate

Address by Mrs L B Hendricks, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry

Golden Horn Congress and Exhibition Centre, Istanbul, Turkey

20 March 2009, 17:00 To 19:00

Chairperson of the Panel

Ministers

Panel Members

Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

Chairperson, thank you for giving me this opportunity to making an input on our experiences in South Africa on the governance arrangements in dealing with water and climate change. While the overwhelming scientific consensus is that we must continue to prevent the emission of green house gasses that cause climate change, there is no doubt that the longer we delay taking action, the greater the mitigation and adaptation costs and the greater the risks of the damage to the habit to and furthermore millions of human lives will be at risk.

Just as important as mitigation is, adapting to climate change must now become a priority. Although mitigation reduces the future cost of adaptation, it will never be an either/or situation and our adaptation response is critical. It is very unfortunate that it is the developing countries which will be the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The immediate mitigation actions will also

influence the amount of spending required in the future for adaptation. The dual challenge is therefore to avoid the unmanageable through mitigation; and manage the unavoidable through adaptation. We must move from the era of identifying problems to the era of implementing solutions.

In South Africa Climate change features very regularly during our Cabinet discussions, and we as Government have made our intentions very clear in terms our commitment to a sustainable future. Our Ministry of Environment Affairs and Tourism is the designated lead Ministry in driving/coordinating our climate change agenda and we have recently adopted a Long Term Mitigation Strategy on Climate Change. The water sector features very strongly in this strategy as one of our primary mediums for adaptation measures which will increase our resilience to climate change. Water resources management is a National Government competence for which I have executive responsibility. South Africa is in the process of preparing our “Second National Communication” to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This National Communication is our formal response in describing our both our contribution and our response to climate change and is our repository of information which has “in-country” relevance as well as international importance.

Our Ministry of Science and Technology has also identified Global Change as one of the five “Grand Challenges” to be addressed in the ten year plan for research focus in South Africa. Climate change is a key component of of Global Change, and water quality and quantity are key elements which will be addressed in this grand challenge with one of the intended outcomes to develop the skills base required to deal with the consequences of climate change.

The Ministries of Environment Affairs and Tourism and Science and Technology earlier this month hosted our very successful biennial National Climate Change Summit with the objectives of:

- Providing all key climate change response stakeholders with an update on the most recent climate change research and current South African initiatives and interventions; and
- Providing a platform for all key stakeholders to discuss and agree the framework for a National Climate Change Response Policy that includes, among others, fiscal, regulatory and legislative packages as well as sectoral implementation plans.

But adaptation in the built environment is only one area of our adaptive focus. Within my own portfolio, climate change has serious implications for our water resources and South Africa being a water stressed country, any threat to our water resources is considered to be serious.

We are currently leading a cross-sectoral approach to water management in South Africa through its *Water for Growth and Development* framework. This framework represents my Government's commitment to water security for the people, the economy, and the environment and considers the critical role of climate change in relation to our planning processes in terms of adaptation. Emphasis is put on the life-sustaining importance of water as a scarce resource in South Africa and to focus the attention on the fact that, unless the continuous judicious use and effective management of our water resources is taken on board by every stakeholder, water availability threatens to become a constraint on growth and development in the near future.

South Africa's water management policies and legislation provide for participative water governance and a spectrum of water management and water services institutions is envisaged for the delegation of powers and responsibilities to relevant levels. Although many of these institutions have already been established, the processes of their establishment and shared

water management by (and in conjunction with these institutions) are complex. Reporting on as well as accountability for, the various roles that institutions play, as a part of the water value chain, is a critical part of the oversight and regulatory environment that we are creating.

Responding to climate change is basically an attempt to manage an uncertain future. Whilst we are not able to accurately predict the effects of climate change on water resources, we do however recognise that solutions are interlinked hence the importance that these be well coordinated and we will continue to focus on:

- Climate change impacts in our water conservation and demand management initiatives;
- Reviewing and reassessing the ways in which South Africa operates its dams and quantifies the ecological reserve to account for a changing climate;
- Reviewing the details of water-sharing agreements in the light of new physical realities;
- Examining the design and implementation of the water allocation reform process to ensure that climate change considerations are taken into account; and
- Designing and implementing an outreach strategy to create awareness of the implications of climate change among stakeholders and customers in the water sector

We have a dedicated team of specialists who are currently busy developing a comprehensive response strategy for the water sector. The development of this strategy is necessitated by a strong call for our sector to adapt to potential effects of climate change. Proposals from this strategy will be integrated into the revision of our National Water Resources Strategy and will form part of a broad

plan to ensure that we protect, develop and conserve our water resources to meet future needs.

Amongst others, the strategy will look at the following:

- Developing tools for data-modelling to track emerging hydrological patterns and the impact on our water resources. These instruments will provide us with information to plan confidently.
- Developing mechanisms for early warning systems including predicting floods and timeously responding to potential risks
- Developing adaptation initiatives that target those catchments that are most vulnerable to climate risks based on current predictions
- Developing reconciliation strategies to manage demand in urban centres, where increased urbanisation and industrial development is putting pressure on the water resources
- Develop investment strategies to develop the necessary infrastructure for water storage and flood management.
- Develop new technologies for water treatment to respond to chemical changes caused by the high temperatures
- Develop aggressive water conservation and demand strategies to ensure efficient water use
- Develop measures to assess carbon footprints from our infrastructure and propose ways of reducing these

Africa is one of the most vulnerable continents to climate variability and change because of multiple stresses and low adaptive capacity. Certain regions, especially in southern Africa, are at risk from increasing water stress which will have significant impacts on livelihoods of people in all sectors of society but more particularly the poor. The number of people exposed to water stress will multiply and it is projected that by 2020, between 75 million and 250 million people will be exposed to increased water stress due to climate change.

Infrastructure, industrial production, income-generating activities and human livelihood strategies will be significantly affected. Furthermore, the productive land area will decrease and agricultural production, including access to food, in many African countries and regions is projected to be severely compromised. The area of arable land suitable for agriculture, the length of growing seasons and yield potential, particularly along the margins of semi-arid and arid areas are expected to decrease. This would further adversely affect food security and exacerbate malnutrition on the continent.

For Africa, the series of past Forums have created awareness of Africa's water challenges, secured an increasing political commitment, galvanized regional collaboration and enhanced global partnerships. The Africa Ministerial Council on Water (AMCOW) has to date effectively engaged in the process of enhancing regional cooperation and coordination to promote the development and implementation of coherent policies and strategies for water resources management. South Africa and its neighbouring states form the Southern African Development Community (SADC), where water is considered to be an indispensable resource for all sectors of the national economies concerned.

In South Africa, four major river systems are shared with Lesotho, Swaziland, Botswana, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Three shared watercourse institutions have been established with our neighbouring states to promote international transboundary co-operation in these 4 rivers, namely:

- Orange Senqu River Commission – ORASECOM
- Limpopo Watercourse Commission – LIMCOM
- Tripartite Permanent Technical Committee - TPTC

The quantity and quality of available water influences where economic development or social upliftment can or cannot take place in the region so it is

vital that there are agreements on water governance issues. SADC places a high priority on the need to achieve sustainable utilisation of natural resources and effective protection of the environment, and this objective was incorporated into policy in the 1992 SADC Treaty. With this explicit introduction of an environmental use, SADC recognises the need for climate adaptation policy priorities to take into account the importance of water for maintaining ecological sustainability of water resources while stimulating economic growth and ensuring the provision of basic services simultaneously. The governments of southern Africa are working together to maximise water management through the following initiatives:

- The establishment of the SADC Division for Water (replacing the SADC Water Sector);
- The Ratification of the Protocol on Shared Watercourse Systems (2001); and
- The Regional Strategic Action Plan (RSAP) for Integrated Water Resources Development and Management in the SADC Countries (1999–2004).

In conclusion must re-iterate that the SADC Protocol on Shared Watercourses is an important political milestone in itself as it provides a framework for regional co-operation on transboundary water issues. The establishment of shared watercourse institutions has led to a more coherent approach in international cooperation on water resource management issues, such as equitable water sharing between countries, management of the basin and operation of infrastructure in the basin for droughts and floods, future water resource development options and water resource protection among others. The SADC Water Policy and the SADC Water Strategy has also subsequently provided overall guidance to member states on their national policies and strategies from a regional perspective.

Finally, our recently approved *Water for Growth and Development* framework which marks the beginning of yet another paradigm shift in the manner in which water is managed throughout the water sector in South Africa. This framework equally considers the critical role of climate change in relation to sector wide planning processes in terms of adaptation.

I Thank you