



water & sanitation

Department:
Water and Sanitation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**CLOSING REMARKS BY DEPUTY MINISTER OF WATER AND
SANITATION, HON. PAMELA TSHWETE
FOR THE SUSTAINABLE MINE CLOSURE NBF/MWCB/NEDBANK
FUNCTION**

5 JUNE 2018

Programme Director,

**Honourable Godfrey Oliphant, Deputy Minister of Mineral
Resources**

**Your Excellencies and representatives from various Embassies in
South Africa**

Chairman of the NEPAD Business Foundation, Mr Geoff Rothschild

Members of the NEPAD Business Foundation Board

**Members of the Mine Water Co-ordinating Body Steering
Committee**

Private sector representatives

Members of the Media

Honoured Guests

It is my honour and pleasure to address this august session on Sustainable Mine Closure on this day, aptly World Environment Day 2018.

The South African Constitution provides the right to an environment that is not harmful to health and well-being, and one that is protected for the benefit of present and future generations. These rights are to be ensured through measures that prevent pollution and ecological degradation.

Aligned to this, in 2015, all United Nations Member States endorsed Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs represent a global action plan for social inclusion, environmental sustainability and economic development, but their attainment depends heavily on high levels of cooperation and partnerships between all sectors and stakeholders.

As I stand here before you, I am pleased to see that the various actors in the mining industry are ramping up their engagements and partnerships with other sectors and stakeholders to incorporate the SDGs into their policies and practises. This is important especially since mining continues to provide the thrust towards contributing to the realisation of SDG objectives in resource-rich countries.

Even as the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) regulates water uses in the mining sector and elsewhere, we have a particular interest in water management associated with mine closure. This is the point at which detrimental impacts on the water resources may materialise into perpetuity.

As an example, though the Witwatersrand Goldfields Acid Mine Drainage Project has made notable progress in recent years, it remains a financial liability to Government. This experience provides a learning curve for us to ensure that mine water impacts at the many abandoned and ownerless mines strewn across the Mpumalanga coal fields, does not become tomorrow's water management legacies, as we have seen in the Goldfields. Sustainable options for mine closure and water management

yielding broad-based community and environmental benefits must therefore be aggressively pursued on a continuous basis.

I commend the private sector companies for taking the lead in establishing the Mine Water Coordinating Body (MWCB), hosted under the NEPAD Business Foundation.

In particular, I acknowledge the mining companies such as Anglo American, Glencore, South32 and Exxaro, as well as Sasol and Eskom for partnering together with the Department of Water and Sanitation and the Department of Mineral Resources, as well as the Mpumalanga Provincial Government to create a platform that seeks to jointly address the responsible and sustainable management of mine water. They are supported by key institutions such as the Chamber of Mines and the Water Research Commission, amongst others.

The Mine Water Coordinating Body (MWCB) perceives itself as an ideal instrument through which mitigation of mining-induced impacts on the water resources of the Olifants River Catchment in the Mpumalanga coal fields could be achieved. The MWCB demonstrates a promise to deliver outcomes that could ensure sustainable mine water reuse, whilst dually showing tangible linked benefits such as small enterprise stimulation, preferential procurement and skills development, especially amongst the marginalised communities around the Mpumalanga coal fields.

I am encouraged that as the MWCB advances itself on the above premise, it is already showing desirable outcomes. The Mafube Colliery project convincingly shows us that water from coal mines can be successfully used to irrigate maize and improve productivity by about 80%. Projects of this nature are multi-faceted: they involve joint public-private partnership, infrastructure development and enterprise creation. Through this effort, a second economy is formed that is capable of sustaining the livelihoods of the communities once mines have ceased operations.

The MWCB should continue to identify opportunities for similar exploits, particularly as regards water security, energy production, job creation and social development.

As we adapt to a varying hydrological climate, compounded by the current economic conditions, the MWCB provides a catalysis that could make us more resilient by promoting alternate water sources and re-use for continued small, medium and micro-business ventures. The potential role of the MWCB in contributing to water security towards the NDP 2030 imperatives must hence be nurtured. The MWCB must be guided by practical lessons learned from its collective initiative, current efforts in water stewardship and responding to the challenges, risks and opportunities.

As I wish the MWCB every success in its future endeavours, I pledge the Department of Water and Sanitation's support to this proactive and inclusive platform for transparent, accountable and equitable mine water management in the Olifants River Catchment.

I would like to emphasise that we collectively muster our efforts to ensure that the fruits borne through this initiative can be applied in all mining towns across our country. I want us to witness the successes of the MWCB being adapted in other areas across South Africa, particularly those towns which have experienced declining local socio-economic conditions due to mining downturn.

The promotion of key principles such as mine water and land re-use, sustainable mine closure, water stewardship, use of suitable and cost-effective mine water technologies, and the establishment of institutions to foster a secondary economy in a post-mining landscape, is vital to ensure communities remain vibrant and self-sufficient long after mines have gone.

I thank you.