

**MINISTER
WATER AND SANITATION
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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SPEAKING NOTES FOR MINISTER FOR WATER AND SANITATION

MEDIA BRIEFING ON THE WEST COAST WATER SUPPLY SITUATION

17 APRIL 2018: GCIS IMBIZO CENTRE, CAPE TOWN

1. Section 27(1)(a) of the Constitution states that everyone has the right to have access to sufficient food and water. Furthermore, Section 27 (2) enjoins the State to take reasonable legislative and other measures, within its available resources, to achieve the progressive realization of the rights contained in section 27 of the Constitution.

2. The National Water Services Act, 1997, furthermore, *inter alia*, provides for the rights of access to basic water supply and the National Water Act, 1998, states in its preamble that,

Recognising that water is a scarce and unevenly distributed national resource which occurs in many different forms which are all part of a unitary, interdependent cycle;

Recognising that while water is a natural resource that belongs to all people, the discriminatory laws and practices of the past have prevented equal access to water, and use of water resources;

Acknowledging the National Government's overall responsibility for and authority over the nation's water resources and their use, including the equitable allocation of water for beneficial use, the redistribution of water

Recognising that the ultimate aim of water resource management is to achieve the sustainable use of water for the benefit of all users;

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Recognising the need for integrated management of all aspects of water resources,

3. The Intergovernmental Relations Framework Act, 2005, establishes the required framework for the national, provincial and local governments, being distinctive, interdependent and interrelated, to provide effective, efficient, transparent, accountable and coherent government for the republic aimed at securing the well-being of the people and the progressive realization of their constitutional rights. Acknowledging that one of the most pervasive challenges facing our country as a developmental state is the need for government to redress poverty, underdevelopment, marginalization of people and communities and the other legacies of apartheid discrimination.
4. Within the above stated context, South Africa remains in the tight grip of the effects of one of the worst El Nino events, which resulted in severe drought conditions in most parts of the country. A National Drought Disaster was declared in March this year.
5. The Western Cape Province is situated largely in a winter rainfall area, which is normally characterised by wet winters and dry summers. Since the last rainy season, however the western, central to northern parts of the province have received below normal rainfall accompanied with higher than normal temperatures, whilst the Southern Cape areas have received normal to above normal rainfall.
6. Despite the rains during the past two weeks in the summer rainfall areas, the Western Cape is at this stage not showing any signs of recovery and the South African Weather Services (SAWS) remains quite bleak
7. In 2017 the lowest rainfall was recorded in Region 4 since 1921 (SAWS forecasting region which includes Cape Town). With three consecutive years of below average rainfall our dam levels have continued to deteriorate year on year. The current drought is very severe and can be described statistically as a 1 in 400 year drought event.
8. The combined capacity of the 43 dams which we monitor on a weekly basis was 16.52% on 15 April 2018, compared with 22.1% at the same time last year, the lowest recorded dam levels in the last 31 years (ie: since 1987).
9. The Integrated Western Cape Water Supply System (WCWSS) serving City of Cape Town towns up the west coast and Irrigators is currently being operated by DWS and under restrictions imposed by the Department of Water and Sanitation, 45% for domestic and industrial users and 60% for agricultural use.

10. The current status of the System (16/04/2018) comprising 6 dams serving the City of Cape Town (CoCT), Drakenstein and Stellenbosch Local Municipalities, the West Coast District Municipality and agriculture: this week decreased by 0.58% to 20.48%. The system was at 23.53% at the same time last year, down by 3.05% (year on year).
11. Despite our best efforts to manage the Western Cape Water Supply Systems Dams through the application of restrictions (domestic and industrial 45% and agricultural use 60%) and intensive **water conservation and demand management**, the capacity of our dams continue to decrease week on week. It must be borne in mind that these restrictions are applied to ensure that the system does not fail. We expect Dam levels to reach the lowest levels in May to June at which stage we anticipate some relief from winter rains.
12. In order to ensure that the system does not fail and that all users comply with the restricted water supply, Compliance Monitoring and Enforcement (CME) activities have been strengthened with additional staff deployed to the Province as well as close collaboration and joint enforcement with the Provincial and Municipal Enforcement staff.
13. While a great deal of media and public attention has been given to the drought as it affects the City of Cape Town, the impacts are Province wide and today we must focus on the dire situation which is developing in the West Coast District Municipal area which includes the Municipalities of Bergriver, Saldanha Bay and Swartland.
14. The West Coast District Municipality supplies water to these Municipalities from either the Voëlvlei Dam or the Misverstand Dams which are at the lowest end of the Western Cape Water Supply system. The Municipalities do also rely to a lesser extent on water abstracted from boreholes.
15. Both the Voelvrei (13.75%) and Misverstand (13.26%) Dams have now reached dangerously low levels and there are physical constraints in abstracting from the lower levels of these dams. Based on assessments carried out by my Department together with the Province and the Municipalities we estimate that the water from the Misverstand Dam could run out on 24 April.
16. Following urgent representations to me from the Premier of the Western Cape Province, Ms Helen Zille, regarding the dire water supply situation for the West Coast Municipalities and the request for me to sanction a release of water from the Berg River dam to supplement the supply to the Misverstand Dam on the lower Berg River, and after very careful consideration of the advice from the Technical Experts in the Department as well as the additional information conveyed to the

Department at the meeting held on Friday 13 April 2018, I have decided on the following plan of action:

- Given that the current estimates indicate that the Misverstand Dam could fail as early as 24 April 2018 (the date at which no further water can be abstracted from the dam without emergency pumping) the Department will make a release of up to 5 Million cubic metres of water from both the Voelvllei and Berg River dams;
- This release will be initiated between the 17 and 20 April 2018 to ensure that the water reaches the Misverstand Dam by 24 April 2018;
- Water will also be supplemented into the Berg River Dam through the emergency pumping scheme from the Theewaterskloof Dam; and
- Should there be any significant rainfall resulting in runoff during the operation the extent of the release will be revised.

17. A number of additional actions will also be implemented as follows:

- A Joint Enforcement and Monitoring Plan will be implemented to ensure that there are no illegal water abstractions from the Berg River during the duration of the release as well as after the release;
- All of the Municipalities must intensify the application of restrictions to ensure that they comply with the provisions of the restrictions as published in December 2017 and January 2018 Government Gazette;
- Municipalities must revisit their implementation plans for the augmentation projects to secure earlier delivery dates;
- A joint communications approach (National, Provincial and Local) should be followed during and after the release of water from the upper dams in the systems.

18. It is also important to note that once the release starts which will be in the order of 20 cumecs, the Emergency Preparedness plan will be initiated through the relevant Disaster Management Centres as there could be some localised flooding immediately adjacent to the river. Communities must be made aware of the so called “fair weather flood” and take necessary precautions during the release period. The river reach from Berg river dam to Misverstand Dam is approximately 138 kilometres and it is estimated that it will take 7 days for the first water to reach the Misverstand Dam.

19. While we deal with this particular drought event it is also important to speed up the implementation of the agreed augmentation projects. In this regard we have committed to continue with the implementation of the Berg River to Voelvllei Augmentation project (BRVAS).

20. Over and above this medium term augmentation project, we are currently engaging with the Premier to determine the feasibility of the Department providing an emergency modular 10 megalitre per day Desalination Plant for Saldanha Bay. An in-principle agreement has been reached. What is under discussion are modalities.

Notes prepared by:
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