

# MEDIA RELEASE



*Viva Water Pure and Clean Viva Forests Rich and Green*  
Department of Water Affairs and Forestry - Chief Directorate: Communication  
Services

## **MEDIA STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY, MR RONNIE KASRILS, MP**

**15 May 2001**

**Embargo: 2pm**

This is the first financial year since the 1997/98 financial year that the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry has received additional funds which will allow us to deliver water and sanitation to even more South Africans at a faster pace.

This year my budget has been increased by R240-million over last year's budget because of additional allocations from the government's poverty and infrastructure budgets as well as substantial contributions from donors.

For the first time since becoming Minister, I am able to embark on new projects rather than being limited to projects, which were started over two years ago. This means that we are going to be able to accelerate our community water and sanitation programme. More than R1-billion has been set aside for this programme during this financial year.

The government is justifiably proud of an outstanding record of delivery by our community water and sanitation programme to 6,5 million people since 1994 at a cost of R4-billion. Last year 997 000 people were reached by this programme.

This is a remarkable achievement in anybody's language.

The R1-billion budgeted this financial year for our community water and sanitation programme will enable us to reach over a million people with basic water supply and more than 100 000 households with sanitation.

At our current rate of progress, within the next seven years we should be able to celebrate the fact that virtually all our people will at last have access to safe and clean drinking water.

It will mean that some time in the financial year 2008/9 a shameful legacy of our country will have been wiped out and a dream of our people and a pledge of our government to provide all with clean water, will have been achieved.

But we cannot afford to be complacent. During my budget vote last year I reported that even where clean water had been provided, we often found that the rural poor cannot afford to pay for water.

In a historic step, government has instituted a policy that a basic amount of 6 000 litres of clean water be provided to poor households free.

Although not all municipalities will be in a position to begin implementing the policy from 1 July 2001, they should at the very least have a specific implementation plan ready by that date.

The provision of free basic water will only be possible if there is effective cost recovery from those using more than the basic amount. It must be clearly understood that consumers must continue paying for their water until their respective local authorities inform them of the date for implementation of the policy.

The cholera outbreak highlighted the need to speed up the sanitation programme. It is estimated that over three million households, or approximately 18 million people, are without adequate sanitation.

Over 80 percent of our rural people, however, have some form of rudimentary do-it-yourself toilets. To deal with this daunting backlog we must develop a strategy that guides our people to improve their home-built toilets so that they are more adequate, environmentally friendly and hygienic. Simultaneously we must mount a massive programme to provide safe toilets for those most vulnerable to cholera.

During the last financial year my Department spent R75-million on the sanitation programme which included Health and Hygiene education to almost 150 000 people and construction of some 13 770 toilets.

We must be quite frank and admit that the previous efforts have not been adequate and this is why I raised the issue at Cabinet and instituted a review programme so as to get our strategy and planning right.

My department has been working at an inter-departmental level with the social cluster of ministers and such key role-players such as the Health, Local Government, Housing and Education departments.

The Minister of Education and I will institute a joint programme to ensure that schools have adequate water and sanitation. The learners, armed with personal hygiene knowledge, will become sanitation ambassadors in their communities.

I want to pledge - just as I did with the free water issue last year - that I will be giving high priority this year to getting an effective sanitation programme underway.

Our flagship Working for Water programme continues to provide employment to an average of 20 000 people annually to clear water threatening invading alien plants.

There has been some concern about this programme being a threat to all forms of exotic plants. I wish to make it clear that we are not about ruthlessly uprooting jacarandas from our city streets and suburban gardens and eucalyptus from picnic spots. In controlled conditions such aliens or exotics are not invasive.

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