

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

14 February 2001

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The Cabinet has approved an implementation plan for 6 000 litres of free water per household per month as part of the government's integrated rural development strategy and urban renewal programme. The date for implementation by local government structures is 1 July this year. This date coincides with the start of the first financial year of our new local councils.

I must stress that consumers should continue to pay for water until they are informed by their local councils on the actual date of implementation in their respective areas.

Free basic water is to be funded using a combination of the equitable share of revenue of local government and internal cross-subsidies from appropriately structured water tariffs in a manner which best reflects the specific situation in the respective local government area.

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, in conjunction with the Department of Provincial and Local Government and SALGA has put in place a support programme for local government. A series of workshops with the newly elected local councils has already begun to amplify the details of the free basic water policy. The support programme has three components:

The preparation of detailed guidelines for local government;

- The establishment of dedicated support teams for local government; and
- The establishment of mechanisms to finance and implement the required metering and billing of water supplies.

I wish to point out that the department's survey of 97 local authorities have found that 21 local councils are already offering some form of free water:

- 10 provide between 5 000 litres and 8 000 litres free water to individual metered households. These include Humansdorp, De Wetsdorp, Kokstad, Durban, Kenhardt and Prieska.
- The balance provide free services through communal standpipes and similar facilities.

We cannot provide free water until the basic infrastructure is in place. We are, however, about to reach the seven million target with more than a million people likely to be added each year for the next three years of this MTEF period. In the process we have created 360 000 temporary jobs.

As the President indicated in his Parliamentary address, this year will see an unprecedented acceleration of the delivery of water and sanitation. In a clear vote of confidence in the South African Government, the European Union has contributed R500-million grant over the next three years for the water and sanitation services. The grant forms part of a R2,2-billion programme which will provide water to 2,4 million people in KwaZulu/Natal, the Eastern Cape and the Northern Province.

These funds will also provide 300 000 people with access to sanitation and reach 2,4 million people with health and hygienic education in the three provinces.

These three provinces – identified in last year's report on poverty as being the poorest of the poor - are targeted in a sustained offensive to eradicate poverty. The capital programme will also continue in other provinces with allocations made in terms of the basic water supply backlog.

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