



MEDIA STATEMENT

Reduced water consumption contributes to an improved water situation in SA

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With at least two months to go before the first possible summer rains, South Africa has a fairly sufficient amount of water in storage to sustain it through the wet season. The behavioural change in water consumption has contributed immensely to the improved water situation.

The latest dam levels weekly report by the Department of Water and Sanitation indicates that there is 22 390,5 cubic metres of water that is stored in reservoirs across the country. Should the figure remain stable until then, it would appear that South Africa is headed for a bumper rainy season with enough water to see us through the year 2020.

Already, Western Cape – which had been plagued by the worst drought in a century – is drenched with water from heavy winter rains that have fallen in the province in the past three months. The department's report estimates that since May the province stored an estimated 1 206,9 cubic metres in its reservoirs and the figure is likely to increase before the end of the rainy season. The average dam level in the province was captured at 71,4%. Water levels in the province have increased by 17% compared to the same period last year.

Eastern Cape and Limpopo are a source of concern as they have the lowest dam levels at 56,4% and 56,9% respectively. Eastern Cape is recovering from a water crisis after the workers of Amathole District Council went on a wild cat strike during which water infrastructure was vandalized. In Butterworth, locals resorted to blocking N2 Highway which is an artery between KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape.

With Mpumalanga continuing its week-on-week slide of dam levels, the department has renewed its desperate call on consumers in the province to intensify their water saving habits until the next summer rains. In addition, the department has set aside millions of rands to mitigate water scarcity in regions that are experiencing dry conditions.

The call comes against the backdrop of a dwindling water situation in the province where in some cases dam levels have plummeted alarmingly. The only thing that can be done to save the situation is a drastic behavioural change in water consumption. Out of the 669 dams available in the province, 23 are categorised as key dams as their contribution is of significance towards water services in the province. .

The province is governed by 3 district municipalities and 17 local municipalities with a total household population of 1 238 861 and total human population of 4.5 million.

In the current financial year the department is planning to spend R28 million to revamp dwindling water resources in Bushbuckridge. The protest-plagued area relies almost exclusively on Inyaka Dam to serve about 20 villages with 90 000 people from Mariti up to Dwarssloop.

Owing to drought conditions the Mkhombo Dam level has dropped to an alarming 1.6%. The declining trend is worsened by the shallow dam basin and large surface area that provides





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conditions for elevated evaporation. This dam is in Dr JS Moroka and serves as the main source of raw water for vast semi-rural communities of Dr JS Moroka LM, Thembisile Hani LM and Sekhukhune District Municipality. The affected population is estimated at 78 000. The water is treated at the Weltvreden Water Treatment Plant located 8km downstream of Mkhombo Dam

The dam's catchment is characterized by low seasonal rainfall and low runoff which have since been magnified by prevailing drought conditions. Mkhombo Dam has a storage capacity of 205 million cubic meters but over the years has hardly ever filled up due to its catchment characteristics

Amongst available mitigation options for the dam is the release of water from Rust de Winter Dam which is currently at 50% level. Rust De Winter has a storage capacity of 28 million cubic meters. The water level at Rust de Winter Dam has been kept as high as possible until a release is made. Since May 2019 an amount of between 250-300 cubic meters per hour is released from Rust De Winter to maintain water supply to the water treatment plant. The release is conveyed through a canal, under gravity, which is meant to reduce losses associated with transmission via the natural river course. Both Mkhombo and Rust de Winter dams are located on the Elands River.

In addition, an amount of R18 million was allocated to Dr JS Moroka during the 2018/19 financial year to augment water supply through groundwater development. Through the intervention, 11 boreholes are undergoing refurbishment while 15 new boreholes have been drilled giving a total of 26 boreholes and two package plants

However, it's all not gloomy as Klipkopjes Dam recorded a slight 0.7% increase from last week's 38.0% to 38.7%. The department's latest weekly report shows that all but the Klipkopjes as among those on these decline. The weekly report estimates storage in the province at 67.6% while the water management areas also recorded a decline in water volumes. The Olifants catchment dropped from 57.1% to 56.5% while Inkomati-Usuthu water management area dropped slightly from 71.7% to 71.1%.

Northern Cape has the fewest dams and smallest in the land whose levels were recorded at 85% this week. Gauteng has even fewer dams whose levels were captured at 89,6%.

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