



COGHSTA

Department of Cooperative Governance
Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs

NORTHERN CAPE

**Key Address by the MEC for COGHSTA Northern Cape, Mr. Bentley Vass, at the
Water Research Commission's Northern Cape Provincial follow-up engagement**

Sol Plaatje University – South Campus, Kimberley

12 March 2024

Programme Director

Members of the Executive Council

Mayors and Councilors present

Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Sol Plaatje, Professor Debra Meyer

**Deputy Board Chairperson of the Water Research Commission, Dr Harrison
Pienaar**

President of IMESA, Mr. Sibusiso Mjwara

CEO of WISA, Dr. Lester Goldman

CEO of the Water Research Commission, Dr Jennifer Molwantwa

Provincial Director SALGA, Ms. Madeleine Brandt

Senior Government officials

Members of the Media

Ladies and gentlemen

Theme: The State of Water in the Province

I am deeply honoured this morning and grateful to the Water Research Commission for the opportunity to address this Commission on this all-important topic, The State of Water in Northern Cape. As Government, we welcome this opportunity to partner with the Water Research Commission and the Sol Plaatje University to look at ways of strengthening the safe and reliable provision of water and sanitation through research and innovation.

Ladies and gentlemen, since the establishment of our democracy, one of the biggest challenges for our government has been the provision of basic infrastructure to our people that the apartheid state had denied us. We are working hard to ensure that our communities have access to basic services, including clean water. Notwithstanding the challenges, but we can assure you that as Government we have plans in place to address these challenges.

When we started this Sixth Administration, we articulated a vision of building a modern, growing and successful province. To this end, great strides have been made in modernizing especially our health and education sectors. This has led to the improved quality of life of our people. We are therefore very excited and thank the Water Research Commission for this second symposium in a space of two years. We believe that together with yourselves, academia and the Water Boards our initiatives will be strengthened through technological innovations that stand to meaningfully benefit our communities. We look forward to these new ideas that will ensure the provision of safe and reliable water and sanitation.

In our Province, we have a very close working relationship with the Department of Water and Sanitation which has been entrusted with the responsibility of providing clean water and adequate sanitation facilities to our people. This is not a mandate that can be taken lightly because it is based on two fundamental human rights; namely the right to life and the right to human dignity. We fully support this mandate and continuously strive to provide our people with clean drinking water and sanitation facilities. It is therefore worth noting, that according to the Census 2022 report, 73.0% of households in our Province have access to flush toilets, which is 2% higher than the national average. This is an

improvement from the 66% reported in the 2011 Census. Also in the 2022 Census report, we see that 82% of households have onsite access to piped water, either inside their dwelling or in their yard. This means that 55% of households have access to water within their dwelling, while 27% of households have access to piped water in their yards. We have managed to achieve this in a Province that is very water-scarce. Many of you would know that the Northern Cape is by far the driest province in South Africa. Most areas in the province rely on groundwater, which unfortunately is over-exploited in some places.

This is coupled with an inherently low level of rainfall. Its variability and inconsistency have become more frequent in the last three decades and it has, in most instances, led to recurring bouts of droughts in certain parts of the province. This is especially the case in the western, northern, and central parts of the province. Whilst there has been a return to normal rainfall patterns throughout most of South Africa, below-average rainfalls are still being experienced in the western regions. In the Northern Cape, this is particularly the case in areas within the Namakwa and Pixley ka Seme District Municipalities.

Groundwater resources are therefore particularly important in the Northern Cape with its high evaporation and low and variable rainfall. The Northern Cape has 439 towns of which 72% (316) are reliant solely on groundwater. A further 26% rely on surface water and the remaining 2% rely on both surface and groundwater. As part of addressing the issue of over-utilisation of groundwater, the Department of Water and Sanitation has compiled an Operation and Maintenance Handbook on the management of groundwater.

The National Water and Sanitation Master Plan commits the Department to implementing the National Groundwater Strategy, thereby promoting the use of groundwater on a larger scale. The focus is on supplying groundwater where it is a reliable supply for domestic and other uses. Furthermore, the province is largely dependent on water releases from the Bloemhof Dam and the Vanderkloof Dam further upstream for its two main surface water resources, the Vaal, and Orange Rivers.

The Orange River's water is primarily available for domestic and industrial use. However, a few thousand hectares of water use entitlements have been reserved for historically

disadvantaged individuals (HDIs) in the agricultural sector. South Africa has signed the Ramsar Convention, which mandates the country to maintain the ecological integrity of the Orange River mouth by implementing environmental flow requirements.

To fulfil this obligation, the Department of Water and Sanitation is in discussions with Namibia to enhance the yield of the Orange River. Joint planning studies conducted with Namibia have identified the construction of a dam in the lower Orange River near Vioolsdrift as a viable alternative to increase the available water yield. This site is situated on the common border between South Africa and Namibia and is envisioned as a joint development that would cater to the projected needs of both countries.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is one water board operational in the Northern Cape namely the Vaal Central Water Board. This Water Board operates mostly in the North Eastern part of the Province through the Vaal Gamagara scheme and also small rural groundwater schemes in the Ga-Segonyana Municipal area.

They also supply water to communities and small mines in the Nama Khoi Municipality. Namakwa Water experiences massive infrastructure refurbishment and operational problems thus we welcome the fact that through the Ministerial directive, the Vaal Central Water Board has become involved in addressing the infrastructure refurbishment issues. All local and district municipalities in the province have been authorized as both water services authorities (WSAs) and water services providers (WSPs), hence there are a total of 31 Water Service Authorities.

Ladies and gentlemen, as mentioned earlier, we have made significant progress towards enhancing our water and sanitation management strategies. We are confident that these improvements will assist us in addressing the challenges that we are still facing. Key among our challenges is technical capacity, ageing infrastructure, financial resources for operation and maintenance as well as security at water treatment plants.

We do however believe that improving technical capacity can be achieved by involving SETAs in the training of new artisans but also upskilling the current workforce who in most cases have been working on the water treatment plants for years.

We also rely on bodies such as the Water Research Commission to come up with innovative solutions especially as it relates to sanitation. There is no doubt that by working together we can ensure that we continue to provide safe drinking water to our communities. Much-needed support to our municipalities to combat water and sanitation services challenges has seen the Department of Water and Sanitation making available R28.5 million to develop Business plans, technical reports and feasibility study reports so that the municipalities can apply for grant funding.

The Department of Water and Sanitation has also developed a 5-year reliable plan for the province and the municipalities. The purpose of this document is to provide a comprehensive implementation plan to achieve reliable water services for all the Water Services Authority (WSA) within five years. This will therefore assist our municipalities in improved planning for Operation and Maintenance, asset management, financial management for Operation and maintenance, development of Cost reflective tariffs and compilation of project priority lists to form part of the Water Services Development Plan.

Let me conclude by extending my best wishes to you for fruitful engagements during the upcoming sessions. I would like to emphasize the significance of collaboration and resource sharing among water sector partners to prioritize water security as a crucial element of sustainable development. Through our collaborative efforts, we can ensure a secure water future for our people for generations to come.

Thank you once more for the opportunity to address you.