Minister to open the National Water Summit  
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The Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, Ms Buyelwa Sonjica, will open the National Water Summit at Gallagher Estates, Midrand, to be attended by 400 delegates from the water sector tomorrow morning.

Among the dignitaries expected to attend are mayors, members of parliament, Ministers, MECs for local governments, Chief Executive Officers of water boards and academics. The summit is a culmination of provincial water summits that were convened by Minister Sonjica and her departmental officials in the past year.

The main purpose of the summit is to discuss the decisions taken at provincial water summits with a view to agree on a National Growth and development Strategy and the role of water in local and national economic development. Driven by the theme “Water for Growth and Development”, delegates are also expected to discuss the role played by water in enhancing the Accelerated Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA), a government programme aimed at accelerating economic development. The department is committed to delivering basic services to the poorest of the poor. Other issues expected to be discussed at the summit are:

- ensuring greater alignment of water services and sanitation issues
- supporting the development of local government delivery capacity
- ensuring greater alignment of sectoral and spatial planning at all levels
- supporting water quality management, including pollution control
- ensuring that water demand management and water conservation issues receive attention at local level

The summit comes against the background of a series of droughts and in some cases floods which are caused by the global warming, resulting in climate change in large parts of South Africa and many parts of the world. In recent weeks water has been plagued by the emergence of rat-tail maggots in tap and toilet systems, sparking fears that the country’s purified water may not be safe to drink directly from the tap. However, Minister Sonjica subsequently assured South Africans that there was no reason to panic as these were isolated incidents and that the government was working with local governments to fight the scourge.

The government has delivered water to a record 12 million of the 14 million people who previously did not have access to clean water since 1994. These were largely in rural areas where the previous government overlooked their basic needs and gave preference to farmers. However, the democratic government worked out water policies that sought to address the backlog in water and sanitation.

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