

Transforming the water sector benefits resource-poor farmers
Media release by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry
21 March 2007

Water is a constitutional right and the National Water Act of 1998 guides the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry to provide water, more equitably, to people of all races, creeds and gender.

In efforts to address the imbalances of the past, specifically where water and economic-related matters are concerned, the Department has moved towards transforming former Irrigation Boards into Water User Associations (WUAs). A WUA is a group of water users in an area who abstract or use water directly from a water resource like a river or a dam. These Associations (organisations) have become the most practical method for the Department to ensure inclusiveness, representivity and democratisation of water.

Unlike Irrigation Boards, WUAs largely have people or users from all races, creeds and sectors. In the past, municipalities could choose to become members of an Irrigation Board, but today they are compelled to belong to a WUA and to share water with other users. The Associations also have a say in municipal management tools for infrastructure and growth, such as Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) and Water Services Development Plans (WSDPs), which are crucial to ensure that people in the area have adequate water supply and sanitation facilities.

People benefiting from these associations are resource-poor farmers, for example farmers with very little or no water for their livestock and farming purposes. The way in which the Department grants licences for using water has often come under the spotlight, but the Department issues a licence to all users prior to water usage.

Hex Valley Case Study (De Doorns)

The Water Act stipulates that water belongs to the nation, not to individual water users. With the many demands and needs for water in each area of the Region, the Department needs to ensure that water is shared fairly (equitably). Thus the Department is encouraging and compelling water users, who use water directly from various water resources such as dams, rivers, groundwater, boreholes and others, to obtain a water use licence.

Through a WUA, such as the Hex River Valley WUA, poor farmers or resource-poor farmers are able to access water through a shared system. In fact, the Department has put the following rules towards obtaining a licence for using water from any resource (*Compulsory Licensing for Water booklet*):

- Take into consideration the representivity of the individuals and/or groups applying.
- How many Historically Disadvantaged Communities (HDIs) are represented?
- Will access promote Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (BBBEE)?
- Is the allocation of water to each user within the group fair? Is water usage in the public interest?
- Does or will water usage create a balance between economic development and the protection of our resources?

On Wednesday, 21 March 2007, the Department invites the Media to communicate a message of transformation in the water sector. The Hex River Valley WUA, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, and the Breede Valley Municipality will be launching the licensing of the new Osplaas Dam, which will benefit resource-poor farmers, established farmers, and communities around this new dam (which has met the licensing criteria stipulated above).

Programme for 21 March 2007 (Human Rights Day):

- 09:00 Site visit of the Osplaas Dam
(De Doorns), *just past Worcester, N1*
Meet at the Hex Valley WUA Offices, and depart for the site visit
- 11:00- 13:00 Back to the Community (The People's Centre)
(De Doorns East, not far from the dam)

For more information, kindly contact:

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