

Minister B Sonjica, MP, speaks firmly on Water Monitoring systems during the Western Cape Province Water Indaba

By: Boitumelo Sefemo

The Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs Ms Buyelwa Sonjica addressed members of the Water Sector earlier on Monday (23 November 2009) during the opening of the Western Cape Water Indaba that was concluded on 24 November 2009.

In her speech, Minister Sonjica drew on the central role of water in the socio-economic spheres.

Her address recorded milestones in water service delivery moving forward.

Firstly, Water Monitoring systems are currently being implemented in the Western Cape and Mpumalanga respectively – this to ensure the provision of relevant information on the quality and quantity of water in the various Catchment Management Areas.

Secondly effective water security measures such as the National Pricing Strategy for Raw Water are being put in place to ensure that as far as possible the costs of the management of water resources and water supply infrastructure are borne by appropriate sector partners.

The need for water for agriculture was strongly highlighted by the farming communities who reported that they have already ensured a 30% increase in water use efficiency by adopting drip irrigation. Drip irrigation has been adopted as a counter to overhead watering sprinklers – and it uses pipes which deliver the water directly to the roots of individual plants and thus results in a water saving.

It came out strongly during the deliberations that the different sectors including the farmers need more water; however, as a way forward, the sector needs to adopt further best practice water efficiency techniques such as Rain Water Harvesting and fog harvesting that can be especially embraced as a response strategy during times of drought like the current drought crippling the Southern parts of the Cape.

As expected climate change was at the forefront of discussions at the Water Indaba. Climate change poses a challenge to long standing ways of doing things but it is imperative that the Province move rapidly to adapt to the impacts of climate change particularly as we prepare a future for coming generations.

As a way forward climate change needs to be incorporated in all planning and in programmes to ensure that there is adaptation and a comprehensive embracement of the opportunities that climate change presents.

The Western Cape Water indaba was rolled up with consultations with representatives from the Civil Society Organizations, Water User Associations, Water Forums, emerging farmers and local Government. During these consultations issues of infrastructure, the use of recycled water for swimming pools and golf courses were discussed in one hand.

On the other hand there was a look at the proper establishment of Catchment Management Areas and the integration of climate change in all of Governmental planning. Such were the issues that were taken forward to the Western Cape Water Indaba.

The last phase of the Water Indaba will be the roll down workshops which will be held throughout the Province to act as a platform for granting feedback to ensure that all role players as outlined before in this document are aware of Government's action as emanating from the Water Indaba and also to ensure that role players understand their role in implementing the Provincial Water Plan which will be the end result of the Provincial Water Indaba.

The Water Indaba was an action oriented exercise during which the Water for Growth and Development Framework was discussed and from which the water sector departed with an action plan in the form of a Provincial Water Plan.

In line with the Directives of the Minister on the first day of the Indaba (23 November 2009) the Department of Water Affairs will remain the custodian of the Provincial Water Plan, with Provincial Government as the implementing agent of the actions contained therein.