

MEDIA RELEASE

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DROUGHT CONDITIONS PERSIST

The Department of Water Affairs has prioritized support for parts of the country affected by the prevailing drought conditions due to low rainfall during last year (2009). According to statistics gathered by the Department, George in the Eden District Municipality in the Western Cape experienced the lowest 12 consecutive months of rainfall since 1921 and is considered **severely dry**. The current conditions started around the month of March 2008.

Having received an annual rainfall of 477mm in the last year which accounts for only 63 percent of the areas Mean Annual Precipitation (the average amount of rainfall received annually), urgent measures had to be put in place to deal with the water shortages including the introduction of severe water restrictions, sewage water is being re-directed to the purification plants and sea water is being desalinated to augment supply.

In addition the water storage levels for this area are well below average and are declining further. The Garden Route Dam: Storage is 30% which is 70% below the median storage. The Wolwedans Dam: Storage is 37.1% which is 60% below the median storage and also gradually declining.

Certain parts of the Eastern Cape are under severe pressure and are also experiencing severe drought conditions; these include Uitenhage under the Cacadu district municipality, which received a total rainfall of 360mm from January to December 2009, accounting for only 69 % of its average annual rainfall. Other affected areas are Grahamstown and Somerset East (Cacadu District Municipality), Kei Mouth (OR Tambo District Municipality) and Hogsback (Chris Hani District Municipality) as well as Phalaborwa in the Limpopo province.

Mava Scott, spokesperson for the department says the Minister's visit to areas like Adelaide and Kuruman this week was part of a nationwide drive to find creative solutions and interventions in the short to long term provision of water to these communities. "these interventions include soliciting funds to commission drilling for water/boreholes in the short term, recycling of sewage water in the medium term but also very importantly the upgrading of the existing water schemes" he said.

The delivery of water tankers to villages who experienced severe water shortages in December in the Zeerust area by the Minister constituted one of these measures to respond urgently to the drought conditions.

Also of critical importance was the issue of water conservation and demand management especially in these drought stricken areas. Mr Scott added that consumer behavior in the use of water can go a long way in addressing the issue of water provision to the communities.

During the 2009 year most parts of the country received normal to above-normal rainfall with the exception of the southern parts of the Western and Eastern Cape Provinces, the western parts on the North West Province, the south-eastern parts of the Limpopo Province and small areas over northern KZN.

The Department of Water Affairs is closely monitoring the situation. Interventions are being implemented and finalized in other areas. Water Conservation and Demand management initiatives have been ongoing and these will be intensified.