

Statement by the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs Ms Buyelwa Sonjica - release of the Green Drop Report

Date: 29 April 2010

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen

Let me begin by expressing my disappointment over the leaking of this report to the press and others, despite the fact that I said previously the reason for the delay in its release is the fact that we are in consultation with various affected stakeholders including the municipalities themselves. This is in order to seek consensus on an action plan to address the problems that exist and to look at the resource requirements.

This report is an initiative of the Department of Water Affairs. It is also a globally unique approach to incentivise local government in order to improve waste services.

Over the past few months following the completion of the report, my department has been accused of being part of some kind of cover up and sweeping the report under the carpet because its contents are not pleasing. This is not at all true. We are committed to ensuring sound intergovernmental relations as such the consultations I have referred to are essential.

It must however be noted that since the completion of the Green Drop report in 2009 and even before that my Department has not rested on its laurels but has been engaged in various waste water turnaround initiatives and there are ongoing efforts to improve the current situation. Our intention as regulator of the water sector is to put things right by supporting where we can, hence the reason for extensive consultations.

I pointed out that the department engaged in various waste water turnaround initiatives some of these include:

- The Department participating in the joint process between National Treasury and relevant Departments to formulate the Bulk Infrastructure and Refurbishment Grant (which is to include funds for waste water treatment infrastructure improvements)
- Partnering with the Siyenza Manje Project administered by the Development bank of Southern Africa (DBSA) to get retired engineers to municipalities where no technical skills are employed;
- Obtaining assistance from United Kingdom waste water specialist to assist with improvements for at least 6 Water Services Authorities;

- Providing all 162 Water Services Authorities (municipalities) with waste water risk profiles for structured planning informing the Integrated Development Planning (IDP) processes;
- Initiating litigation where the regulatory process was found to be unsuccessful;

I want to state clearly that we acknowledge the shortcomings in the management of Waste Water Treatment Works as revealed by this report. These assessments were done in order to help struggling local authorities to better manage their treatment works and to incentivise those who have done well.

The main objective of this regulation approach is to create a target for waste water management excellence which has been set at 90% compliance with the stringent criteria set. I am encouraged by the fact that this programme forced the management of waste water treatment into the foreground of many municipal discussions since it was for far too long neglected, under-funded and under-maintained.

Yes, the findings of the inaugural Green Drop Report are certainly not favorable but all is not lost. The report confirms the need for improvement of waste water services, and requires pioneering initiatives that would result in sustainable turn around. I must also mention that the upgrading of waste water treatment works is already a priority of government and forms part of its program of action.

My department is fully supportive of the Local Government Turnaround Strategy facilitated by the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs. This process will remain one of the key stimulators of sustainable change in the management of waste water services in the country.

An important fact to remember is that this report is only reflecting on 53% of waste water treatment facilities in the country, we therefore introduced a risk-based assessment which was conducted over the second half of 2009. This report equipped the department with a complete view on the status of the entire municipal waste water infrastructure. It largely correlates with the findings of the Green Drop report but also provides tangible yet practical risk abatement targets towards sustainable turn around.

The risk based exercise provided all municipalities with site specific analysis of their waste water treatment business in terms of Effluent Quality, Treatment Capacity vs. Operational Volumes and Process Controlling Skills. Many municipalities were empowered by this process to do effective planning towards more efficient waste water management.

I now turn to the finding of the 2009 Green Drop assessments. The report revealed that out of the 449 treatment plants assessed, 7% of these were classified as excellently managed, 38 % scored between 50% and 89 % measured against the stringent set

criteria, this means that these systems performed within acceptable standards. Thus a total of 45% of systems performed within acceptable standards. This implies that in spite of all the evident shortcomings, the sector is not in complete disrepair.

I am however concerned about the remaining 55% of the assessed waste water treatment works that scored below 50%.

As I stated earlier some of our municipalities face many challenges, these include: the fact that some treatment works were not designed to serve previously disadvantaged communities, a lack of adequate funding for operations and maintenance, skills shortages and insufficient attention given to maintenance by municipalities.

We should all be encouraged by the excellent Green Drop performances of municipalities such as:

- Mbombela Local Municipality,
- EThekweni Metro
- City of Tshwane
- City of Cape Town
- City of Johannesburg and
- George Local Municipality;

These municipalities have shown that excellent waste water services management is a possibility which should serve as the motivation for other municipalities.

I want to conclude by saying we are committed to doing all within our power to ensure a turnaround in the general state of the waste water treatment works in our country.

Thank you