MEDIA RELEASE ON THE PROGRESS THUS FAR WITH REGARD TO A RESPONSE TO THE MATTER OF ACID MINE DRAINAGE PARTICULARLY IN THE WITWATERSRAND AREA.

Attention: all media

26 November 2013

Embargo: None

Acid Mine drainage (AMD) is a challenge that faces South Africa as a result of mining activities over more than 150 years. As a result thereof and its decant into the environment and water courses, government through a Cabinet decision embarked on a process of addressing this challenge. Included in the Cabinet decision was the fact that AMD is not just a Department of water affairs issue but needed to be looked into with all the requisite skills for a comprehensive process to unfold.

An Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) on AMD was set up and co-chaired by the Ministers of Water and Environmental Affairs and Mineral Resources. This IMC includes the Ministers of Finance, Science and Technology and National Planning.

An Inter-Governmental Task Team (IGTT) co-chaired by the Directors-General of Water Affairs and Mineral Resources is responsible to ensure that the programme of addressing the matter of AMD is underway and progress is reported to the IMC thus to Cabinet.

It was essential for the government to understand the impact of AMD and what the possibilities of addressing it are out there. In this regard a task team of scientists and professionals in the water sector, namely the Team of Experts (ToE), under the leadership of the CEO of the Council for GeoScience was put together with very tight timelines and schedule to advise the IGTT and in the process the IMC.

In line with its mandate, the ToE presented their findings and suggestions to the IGTT and IMC. The recommendations were accepted and endorsed up to the level of Cabinet and the IGTT mandated to implement. The ToE report recommended the implementation of the “emergency works” which implied immediate and short-term solutions (pumping and neutralisation of AMD), primarily in the area of the Western Basin where there was active decant of AMD into the water courses. The emergency works as we call them, are aimed at containing AMD at a pre-determined level which
will ensure that ground and surface water is protected, as well as preventing other AMD-associated environmental and socio-economic impacts.

For all intents and purposes, the situation in the three basins that the IMC gave instructions for work to be done can be broken down as follows:

- In the Western Basin, which was always the one under most threat, the immediate solution is operational. It can be reported that thus the surface decant of AMD into the environment has been eradicated.
- In the Central Basin work towards the construction of an AMD pumpo station, neutralisation plant, as well as waste and neutralised water pipelines at the former East Rand Proprietary Mines (South west Vertical Shaft) commenced in January 2013. Civil works are at an advanced stage of development and commissioning is projected for December 2013. Currently the level of underground AMD does not present any environmental or socio-economic risks.
- In the Eastern Basin there is a projection for infrastructure development similar to the one at the Central Basin. A bid for the project has recently been advertised and mandatory briefing meetings in line with the bid have been convened with potential service providers. All things being equal it is envisaged that the bid will be awarded by December 2013 with the project commissioning envisaged for December 2014.

Another critical recommendation from the ToE report was around a long-term feasibility study towards concrete management of the AMD. This study was duly undertaken and the Long Term Solution Feasibility report has been received by the Department of Water affairs on behalf of government. There is an approval process of the report currently underway, which will lead to the presentation of the report to the IMC.

It is the firm belief of government and its partners that there is significant progress being made towards addressing this critical challenge to our environment and water resources with socio-economic impacts. The government therefore would like to bring a sense of comfort to the populace that the challenge of Acid mine drainage, particularly in the Witwatersrand, is being attended to, and that in the end this will be an issue that is addressed though all the areas where mining happens and will continue to happen.

ENDS.

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Issued by the Department of Water Affairs on behalf of the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Acid Mine Drainage.