

We need to protect our water resources

By Annerie Weber MP - DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries

Minister Creecy and Sisulu,

The dams and rivers in the country is infested with alien invasive plants.

The increase in invasive plants decrease the availability and quality of water, creating the perfect conditions for soil erosion, land degradation and loss of biodiversity

On 26 November 2019 Parliament accepted the motion without notice that moved to:

1. Congratulate Rowing SA on securing the rights to host the 2023 World Rowing Masters Regatta at Roodeplaat dam.
2. Recognises that this is the first World Rowing event ever to be held in Africa.
3. Notes that the championships will boost tourism by bringing thousands of athletes and tourists to South Africa.
4. Called on Department Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) to ensure the integrated control of aquatic weeds at Roodeplaat dam as not to put the championships at risk.

On 7 February 2020 the Department Water and Sanitation (DWS) gave a directive to Roodeplaat dam to stop the spraying of invasive plants. DEFF stated that EPWP workers will be deployed to manually retrieve this invasive plants. The Minister indicated in June 2020 that the Covid lockdown temporarily stopped all implementation activities such as the manual removal of water Hyacinth and biomass from the dam and the release of biocontrol agents. She further indicated that DEFF is in the process of directly appointing contractors to manually remove the Hyacinth. Three months later in October 2020 the dam was more than 65% infested with Hyacinth and still no sight of EPWP workers.

By November 2020 International athletes had to cancel and moved somewhere else as exercising on the dam was not possible. Businesses lost all income as fishermen, holiday goers, professional athletes, weddings and functions were cancelled as the dam was covered under Hyacinth. Employees lost their jobs and the local economy suffered.

In December 2020 the Department agreed to use herbicide. But at what cost?

Now it is May 2021 and the Hyacinth is growing rapidly again, as they can double every 11-18 days, and almost a year later, no EPWP workers and clean dam.

Why are both departments not actively doing what they could to ensure economic growth, local employment through better water quality and the Hyacinth is removed in order to ensure that the Rowing Masters Regatta is held in 2023.

Hartebeespoortdam, also a tourism attraction, is already 11% covered in Kariba weed and increasing every day. Again no EPWP workers as promised.

The Western Cape is actively removing alien invasive plants, while seven million litres of water per hectare is returned to the river system.

Research done in 2019 by the Nature Conservancy showed that the removal of invasive alien plants is the most cost-effective intervention to avoid a water crisis in South Africa by delivering the highest potential water savings.

Where many provinces in South Africa have water scarcity, it should be a priority to remove all invasive plants in our water as it is destroying our water resources.

We need to protect our water resources.