

## **The best investment SA can make is to put clean, affordable water into every household**

By **Nicholas Myburgh** – Shadow Deputy of Water and Sanitation

Mr Speaker, honourable members,

It is my great honour today to address this House for the first time, and I feel privileged to be speaking in this particular debate since water is surely the most valuable resource of them all!

Honourable members, water and sanitation determines both the survival and the dignity of every human being...it is non-negotiable, and yet today we are facing a looming water crisis which has the potential to make Eskom look like a minor hiccup!

One can only hope that the recent appointment of not only a new Minister, but also a new DG and CFO will bring renewed purpose and direction to a department which has until recently excelled in the dubious fields of maladministration, fraud and theft on a scale seldom seen before.

This is a department where literally billions of Rands has gone missing, money that should have been spent on facilitating national water security through infrastructure development and properly structured maintenance.

The most recent Blue Drop and Green Drop reports tell an alarming story, with the Western Cape (predictably) as the only glimmer of hope against the backdrop of massive failure elsewhere in the country. Support and intervention is required in order to avert both a human and environmental disaster.

The grain, wool, and dairy powerhouse of SA is situated in the Overberg region of the Western Cape. Sadly, the Overberg Water Board is not fulfilling its mandate in providing a source of affordable and reliable water to a key agricultural region of our country, thereby posing a serious risk to the economic prospects of the entire region. It is time that the Department takes the necessary steps to improve drastically the performance of the Overberg Water Board. Mr Speaker, much the same can be said of the various other water entities throughout the country.

Honourable members, the truth of the matter is that South Africa does in fact have enough water. We are blessed with abundant sources of water which, if managed correctly, will sustain us well into the future.

But what is equally true is that water is being wasted on a massive scale, revenues are not collected, and little to no consequence management is being implemented.

One hundred and twenty years ago Vladimir Lenin, icon of failed governments and impoverished nations everywhere, posed the following question: "What is to be done?"

Although Lenin always came up with the wrong answers, at least he understood at that moment that drastic action was required.

And so Mr Speaker, as always the DA today wishes to help the minister and his department in coming up with the right answers. We are a Party that believes in constructive engagement. We want to see Water and Sanitation succeed because we want to see South Africa succeed!

We believe, at a bare minimum, that the following needs to be done:

Firstly, support and intervention at municipalities and entities should be prioritised where the AG can provide evidence of good governance and sound financial management. In other words, help and reward those first who have demonstrated a track-record of good governance.

Secondly, demonstrate your commitment to human dignity by eradicating the bucket system everywhere in South Africa.

Thirdly, clean-up corruption, expedite disciplinary processes, and initiate civil and criminal court proceedings against those officials who have resigned, but also against those politicians who have been fired!

Fourthly, dramatically increase expenditure on mega infrastructure development. And as a government, stop treating the private sector as your enemy...establish meaningful long-term Public Private Partnerships in order to augment accelerated infrastructure development.

In the fifth place, implement action plans and control measures to improve revenue collection and to recover monies owed to the department and entities.

{And finally, start taking the work of the Water Research Commission seriously by better utilising their products and technology to tackle enduring challenges pertaining to water leaks, and to improve waste water management.}

In conclusion, and on a somewhat lighter note, I wish to remind the House that Winston Churchill proclaimed many years ago that the best investment anyone can make is to put milk into a baby. Whilst that still remains true as far as infants are concerned, let there be no doubt that in SA today surely the best investment is to put clean, affordable water into every household!

I thank you.