



Mathjhabeng Ongoing Water Crisis Unveiled

March is observed as South Africa's Human Rights month, but the residents of Matjhabeng's rights have been continuously violated by the administration and ANC leadership of Matjhabeng due to poor planning and the complete lack of consequence management.

An oversight visit was done by Dr Igor Scheurkogel to provide residents with a clear picture of why residents are continuously left destitute with little to no water, as nothing definitive has come from Matjhabeng indicating the real cause of this ongoing crisis residents are facing. Furthermore, the findings that were made during the oversight and interactions were confirmed by a presentation by Dr Moorosi, the CE of Bloem Water, to the council after the request by the Democratic Alliance to provide clarity on why the residents of Matjhabeng are constantly struggling with water supply.

Balkfontein has 11 raw water pump sets, of which only 7 are operational and the remaining 4 are currently with the service provider for repairs. Balkfontein has 16 potable water pump stations, of which only 12 are operational, and out of the remaining 4 pumps that are out of operation, 3 pumps are at service providers. If the Balkfontein plant is fully operational it can produce 360 million litres per day. From Balkfontein there are 3 pipelines that serve the 2 reservoirs at De Erf, however. One pipeline is currently not operational due to leaks that Bloem Water is unable to fix. Bloem Water however is cash strapped, and its inability to effect repairs is caused by a lack of equipment and machinery which cannot be procured due to the poor payment record of the local municipalities to which Bloem Water supplies water.

De Erf booster pump station has 7 pumps with 2 pumps that are not operational. The old reservoir also has 1 operational pump which pumps water to Koppie Alleen and two smaller pumps which pump to the Allenridge reservoir. The new reservoir has 4 Sulzer pumps which pump to Koppie Alleen. From De Erf to Koppie Alleen reservoirs there are also three pipelines feeding the reservoirs but only two are functional due to too many leaks on one line. This means a further reduction in the water supply to the Koppie Alleen reservoirs in Riebeeckstad.

From the high-level reservoirs at Koppie Alleen, the water will gravitate into the pipe system in the lower laying areas which is called the Welkom Ring Main. The pipeline runs in a circular fashion around and within Welkom and Thabong. From this pipeline Odendaalsrus, Kutlwanong, Welkom and Thabong receive potable water. Therefore, the water will automatically gravitate from the high-level reservoirs towards the pipelines if they are not



closed so that the water is pumped into the reservoirs and then from there they are distributed to the towns of Matjhabeng.

From the Koppie Alleen reservoirs water is pumped to Hennenman, Phomolong, Ventersburg and Mmbahabane to the Brabant reservoir. For Riebeeckstad reservoirs to be able to pump water the high-level reservoirs must be over about 20% to be able to pump to the Riebeeckstad reservoir and supply water to residents of Riebeeckstad.

It is evident that Bloem Water has a serious deficiency in its capacity to provide constant water to Matjhabeng which stems from its inability to effect maintenance on pipelines, equipment and pumps because the organization does not receive regular payments from their customers i.e., local municipalities.

To further alleviate the water demand on the Koppie Alleen Reservoir the Saaiplaas booster station which would normally feed from the Virginia plant is currently non-operational. All the electric cables that feed the pumps have been vandalized and repairs are yet to be affected. If the station is operational, it would be able to assist the Virginia plant to pump water to Bronville and near lying Welkom suburbs, reducing the water demand on Koppie Alleen. The biggest challenge currently is security. The electric fencing is completely damaged and dilapidated, and security guards are not equipped with the necessary tools to be able to first protect themselves, let alone the pumping station. They are frequently targeted by Zama-Zama. Just two weeks ago 19 Zama-Zama's attacked the 4 guards on duty. Currently, Bloem Water pays about R 500 000.00 to Harmony GM to assist Bloem Water in protecting the current assets in the station.

At the 28 March Council Sitting it was reported that Matjhabeng Local Municipality owes Bloem Water R 5 090 795 176, therefore it cannot be said that payment from Matjhabeng Local Municipality to Bloem Water is not the issue, as the Executive Mayor Khalipha did in his statement on 17 March 2023 when he met with all ward councillors about the national shutdown and service delivery. Clearly poor payment is the root cause. Matjhabeng's bill for February 2023 was R 67 534 175 and Matjhabeng only paid R 15 782 132 which is only 23% of the total bill. The low payment rate of Matjhabeng has been the norm and this cannot be sustainable for Bloem Water.

These are the following steps the DA Matjhabeng wants to be implemented to ensure Chapter 2 of the Constitution of South Africa, as well as the Water Services Act 108 of 1997 is adhered to:



- Matjhabeng Local Municipality sets up a water leak task team to prioritize water leaks in Matjhabeng in the order of public space areas, valve leaks, water meter leaks and public facilities.
- Matjhabeng Local Municipality is to request a 6-month plan, reviewable monthly, from Bloem Water, setting out a list of emergent maintenance that is required with a cost estimate so that the money so paid to Bloem Water can be set off against what is owed, but also that the money is ring-fenced and only allocated to the month to month critical plan of maintenance, as reviewed.
- If Bloem Water does not meet the deadlines or stay within the budget, their bill against Matjhabeng will be penalized and subsequently discounted to ensure targets are met and residents have a sufficient water supply.
- Bloemwater is to ensure the payment of communication lines is in all budgets and that no additional funds are spent by officials to travel between stations as they are unable to communicate via internet lines to the machines operating the pump stations.
- Matjhabeng Local Municipality is to ensure that all communication received from Bloem Water about disruptions is communicated within an hour to all councillors, ward committees, all social media platforms and formal press if informed about developments.

The crisis will only be averted if the political leadership of Matjhabeng listens to valuable input, which is why we are continuing with the Water is Life protest. Please follow this link <https://petitions.da.org.za/p/free-state-water> to sign up for the protest and then be able to be informed in advance to ensure your presence is secured.

The DA is committed to ensuring that things get done and that the rate-paying residents of Matjhabeng get their money's worth. In 2024 each resident will have the opportunity to start the process of changing their lives to ensure that the ANC does not have a 50% majority in the Provincial Legislature because then local municipalities would have to respond to transparent and corrupt free government.

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Dr Igor Scheurkogel
DA Caucus leader Matjhabeng Local Municipality
Phone: 073 860 3698
www.da.org.za

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073 860 3698

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