

## Water and Sanitation in the News

### Water affairs halts construction on sewerage pipeline

The national department of water affairs has ordered the Metsimaholo local municipality to halt construction on the controversial raw sewerage pipeline from Refengkgotso outside the Free State town of Deneysville into the Vaal Dam. Local DA councillor Johan Geyser tabled a motion against the project in March this year, but the speaker of the ANC-led council, Sello Matena, has refused to bring the matter before council for debate.

Geyser then reported the irregular project to the national department of water affairs. The department has now made it clear that the municipality must apply for the relevant authorisation and licenses to ensure it is compliant with the National Water and the Water Services Acts. "It was a close call. The municipality was determined to complete the project in record time. Pumping raw sewerage into the Vaal Dam would have polluted the environment and poisoned a critically important fresh water source, compromising the drinking water quality of millions of South Africans," said James Letuka, DA member of the Free State legislature.

Geyser told News24 that water affairs' Flora Mamabola assured him on Tuesday morning the municipality could not commence with construction without applying for the prescribed authorisation. "As far as I know, no impact studies were done before construction. The pipes, leading from Refengkgotso over a distance of three kilometres, have reached the dam," he said. "They only have to connect the pipes across the road before they can start pumping."

Source: [News24, 02 June 2015](#)

### Context

Over the past few years, water scientists and other experts have described the Vaal River - which supplies water to Gauteng, the country's economic and industrial powerhouse, as well as to farmers in Gauteng, North West, the Free State and Northern Cape - as "in crisis" and "under siege" by polluters. Because many waste-water treatment plants across the country are not functioning properly, water scientists say that tons of raw sewage are daily being discharged directly into the Vaal River or into tributary rivers which flow into the Vaal. The main concerns include:

- Acid mine drainage flowing from the Mpumalanga coalfields, as well as other polluted water that mines discharge into rivers after processing minerals;

- Toxic, salt-laden effluent illegally released into the Vaal River and its catchment area by industrial processing plants; and
- Poorly treated sewage discharged into rivers by municipalities, which seem to be an increasing problem not only in the Free State, but in other provinces as well. For instance, in February 2015 there were reports of untreated sewerage spilling into the Vaal River at a municipal site in North West Province. This came after two waste water treatment plants in the Matlosana local municipality became dysfunctional. Some of the farmers along the river complained that the extent of pollution in the water began to cost them their live-stock. In March 2015, AfriForum sent a written complaint demanding Lekwa Local Municipality to respond to the bad sewage situation in Standerton in Mpumalanga. The Municipality was held responsible for the dumping of large quantities of sewage into the Vaal River. AfriForum reportedly took water samples for testing at SANAS, an accredited laboratory, who found that the E. coli count in the water was more than 100000 units per 100 ml (more than 200 times the allowed limits).

Community and environmental activists have therefore called on government authorities to urgently upgrade waste water plants along towns of the Vaal and that funding should be 'ring-fenced' for this purpose only. Experts have indicated that a lack of water and waste water infrastructure maintenance and misuse of municipal and government funds, on top of allowing development to take place and not upgrading the necessary infrastructure simultaneously have exacerbated the country's already bleak water security outlook.

Sources: [Times Live, 2011](#); [Infrastructurene.ws, 2015](#); [News24, 2015](#)

Urgent interventions such as the implementation of enhanced water asset and operational management systems are also needed. The **Municipal Assistant™** system helps to address service delivery challenges through innovative technology – it serves as a centralised databank that facilitates the management, administrative and operational functions of water care works and related activities. It helps to ensure that the correct water demand planning and infrastructure maintenance procedures are implemented to support sustainable supply of good quality drinking water and discharge of properly treated waste water.

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