

Tarnia Baker: Non-functioning Waste Water treatment plants must receive immediate attention

Honourable Chairperson;

No sane or willing person would voluntarily drink, bathe or play in water polluted by sewage, and yet that is what millions of South Africans are subjected to every day, despite the Constitution guaranteeing that every person has the right to an environment that is not harmful to their health and wellbeing, as well as the right to sufficient water.

The ANC government committed itself to eliminating the basic water supply backlog by 2008 and the basic sanitation backlog by 2010. And yet here we are in May 2015 with millions of South Africans still living without access to clean drinkable water, still dependent on rivers and streams for their supply of water.

A total 3% of all deaths in our country are directly related to the use of unsafe water. Over the years there have been a number of outbreaks of cholera and other gastrointestinal sicknesses nationwide.

Just last week a 30 year old man from Trichardt in Mpumalanga was diagnosed with Cholera after drinking water from a stream in a field where he tends to his cattle daily. A number of dead animals have subsequently also been found near this stream, which is being polluted by sewerage from a nearby broken pump station.

Sadly, this pollution is evident in almost all our rivers and dams all over our country. The Hartebeespoort Dam in the North West is nothing more than a stinking pool of sewage, with tap water in that area being totally unsuitable for human consumption!

Midmar Dam in KwaZulu-Natal is on the verge of collapse. E.coli levels in water tested from tributaries collected near Mpophomi and Siphumelele townships located alongside this dam are at 450 000 and 39 000 per 100 ml of water, respectively.

This is 3/400 times more than the level of 130 which is considered safe for household and recreational use!

Earlier this year the Swartkops River in Nelson Mandela Bay Metro was polluted by raw sewerage equal to 76 olympic swimming pools spilling into it unabated, over a 15 week period.

Chairperson, we are at risk of completely devastating the quality of our water supply in South Africa by 2019 unless a considered attempt to remedy this situation is immediately actioned.

Water quality management is an exclusive national competency, and is therefore directly the responsibility of the Minister of Water and Sanitation. Poor and non-functioning Waste Water Treatment plants must receive immediate attention.

The cost of building new dams and desalination plants is far greater than effectively managing and maintaining rivers and catchment areas. The economic impact on tourism and sporting activities on our dams is severely impacted by the poor quality of water in these dams and rivers.

Just consider the negative impact of the pollution of Midmar Dam which is host to the annual Midmar Mile, a sporting event which attracts approximately 50 000 participants' and spectators to this area, boosting the local economy.

If the current trends of pollution, rising costs of water purification, increased eutrophication of our water systems are anything to go by, I dare say the Ministry of Water and Sanitation is severely lacking.

Minister, I know it is a strange concept for the ANC, but I urge you to hold the culprits of this pollution accountable. People who are putting our people, our beautiful country and our children's future at risk must be dealt with by the full extent of the law.