

# WATER RESOURCES MEETING NOTES

Penny Rees attended the Water Resources Strategy meeting in Durban last week. These are her notes and comments on the proceedings:

They are getting public input into the draft Water Resources Strategy document. Very sobering. The bottom line is we are running out of water and there is desperate scrabbling to stretch our supplies (which isn't going to work long term).

We broke away for a short while in separate interest groups. In the environmental group my input was that the following needs to be in the strategy :

- The World Report on Dams & the SA report from this (drawn up with Kader Asmal) should be implemented. In the full session earlier I brought it up and asked why so few people know about it. I particularly referred to environmental reserves; the EIA process comments in the report; the building of more dams without properly

eliminating all other options first; also the protection of the last undammed rivers such as the Umkomaas and why then is a dam already planned on that river? Neil van Wyk's response was that he hoped that the dam report would be fully included in the final strategy document.

- Research & implementation of protection of buffer LENGTHS along rivers. These should be downstream of potential contamination sites so as to protect a long enough length/area to give the river space to heal and clean up after a spill.
- Access to water – the communities living along the river who do not have access to potable water and whose sole water supply is the river.
- Compliance – the majority of the negative impacts seen on the uMngeni are due to, or as a result of, non-compliance. If enforcement were done properly, there would be few impacts. This sentiment re: lack of monitoring and enforcement was repeated a few times during the day.

- The problems of Co-Operative Governance: which does not work with issues such as municipal non-compliance and DMR licensing – another sentiment that came out a few times. Someone suggested that DWA start standing up to DMR and end DMR’s bullying of them.
- Climate change
- Desalination – caution re: brine disposal – I have heard something about brine released back into the ocean destroying all ocean life in the area due to the increased salinity.

- Rain water harvesting via rain water tanks should be encouraged.

This is “illegal” in many municipalities – by-laws and this should be changed. This was also a subject brought up a couple of times – a chap called Hugh (contact of Bryan Ashe) will be putting in a full proposal, this is his speciality/mission in life. When he first stood up and suggested this in the full meeting, the immediate response (can’t remember who, either Angela Mansfield or Neil van Wyk) was “No, No, No that will rob the river of the water it receives from runoff”. Later Neil seemed to get the message that this is not the case.

I suggested that it be policy that all RODs for new housing developments (low cost or otherwise) include that rain water tanks be installed.

- I suggested that every development application should come with a fee and that, that money could be used towards hiring staff for compliance and enforcement work (like is supposed to happen with sand mining), or to fund other areas that are cash strapped – eg general enforcement.
- Water quality management is almost non-existent
- CMF's need more clout – they all know what is happening and what the problems are but can effectively do nothing.
- Implementation of Ecological reserve – also a topic that came up a few times in the general meeting.
- When new developments are approved with the proviso that the water monitoring of the ground water/boreholes be undertaken, the ROD always states that annual testing be done. This is too infrequent – to find out about a contamination after maybe 11 months! I recommended monthly tests.

- Fracking – potential massive threat to KZN water quality.
- Interbasin transfers: I made the point that all we are doing is re-shuffling the water from one area to the other and that sooner or later there will be no more water to continue this practice. We will run out of water – then what? The projections for supply/demand shown in the main meeting are only to about 2025 – then what? Neil’s reaction implied that they had no idea what to do then! I get the impression that there is some desperate juggling happening to keep water supply going, with the knowledge that that this is only short term and then???
- Catchment management needs to be vastly improved.
- The rivers’ goods and services must be taken into account – someone mentioned the timber industry paying for the water the trees use.
- And lastly (and one of the most horrifying to me): the suggestion in Neil van Wyk’s summary he had done earlier on Water Security. After making it obvious that the planning is done around the concept “we will develop therefore how can we supply water?”, he alluded to the fact that there are plans to downscale our

agricultural practices. That the water available to many farmers will be taken away from them to supply other areas. I was wondering how they expected farmers and our food production to survive? Then came the jolt – VIRTUAL WATER. The plan is to have agreements with neighbouring countries to supply South Africa's food needs. I shot the idea down in flames permanently: carbon footprint of all the food miles when everyone is saying buy local, don't import; the "hostage"/sanctions possibility of the supply country cutting off our supply. Can't remember what else I said, I was on a roll. We are doing this all the wrong way develop then look for water. It should be the other way around. There is not enough water for the develop-at-all-costs scenario and this attitude needs to change.

Source: <https://umngeniriverwalk.wordpress.com/2012/11/17/water-resources-meeting-notes/>