

Water joins critical list

SOUTHERN Africa has the potential of becoming one of the world's most productive breadbaskets, but for one major problem – a serious shortage of water in some of the most fertile areas.

This is particularly apposite as the world grapples with rising food prices that have already caused violent unrest in many parts of the globe and a warning from trade union federation Cosatu that these could spread to this country.

But water is a worldwide problem as the Inter-Parliamentary Union heard at its assembly in Cape Town. The parliamentarians were warned that the world faces a water crisis as increasing competition between its various uses and users puts pressure on the planet's most indispensable natural resource.

With more than a billion people deprived of this basic necessity, the fact is, 7 500 people die every day because they lack safe water and decent sanitation. Our rivers are polluted and becoming worse as competition looms between users up-stream and down-stream.

The World Bank estimates that access to sanitation, the practice of good hygiene and a safe water supply could save 1.5 million child deaths every year – mainly from infectious diarrhoea.

And now water users in eThekweni have been warned that the supply of cheap water is over. Heavy users will be financially penalised and the money used to provide a better water service to the poor.

From July a new water tariff will sting those who are considered "water guzzlers". There will be a baseline consumption of 24 kilolitres. Anyone using more than this will pay dearly for the privilege.

In view of the global warnings over the lack of clean water, consumers here must learn to use water sparingly and with respect.

However the municipality itself must jack up its own house if it is to have any credibility with water consumers. As it stands, 35% of all water bought from the Umgeni Water Board is lost, either through leaks or theft, which costs the council tens of millions every year. Consumers would have every right to demand that this loss is stemmed before they are stung for their water usage.

Tourism boost

THOUGH there are sometimes negative issues that knock us back, it seems as if there are some real positives when it comes to tourism in KwaZulu-Natal. At the yearly awards evening this week, multi Grammy-winning group Ladysmith Black Mambazo won an award for being "outstanding tourism ambassadors" while there was "special recognition" to the Stables Wine Estate in Nottingham Road.

Several other people and establishments were also honoured. We congratulate all the winners.

