

Water shortage threat to KZN

RESOURCES STRAINED

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WATER experts have warned that massive industrial and residential development, coupled with erratic weather patterns, will lead to worsened water shortages in KwaZulu-Natal.

The shortage is likely to affect four major industrial hubs in the province – Durban, Pietermaritzburg, Richards Bay/Empangeni and the Ogwini District Municipality (around Port Shepstone).

Addressing a water summit convened by Umgeni Water, Uthukela Water and Mhlathuze Water last week, Lehasa Moloi, head of water resources infrastructure at the water affairs and forestry department, said the demand for water in KZN and the country was increasing.

“This is owing to rapid economic growth, population growth and other social development needs. The threat of climate change and environmental degradation is also a living challenge for the future availability of water resources,” warned Moloi.

He noted that KZN and the Eastern Cape had the highest concentration of infrastructure backlogs.

Addressing the same summit, SACP secretary-general Blade Nzimande said water was a scarce resource in South Africa, yet there was no public

discussion about how to deal with the situation.

“We are not involving communities in resolving the problem of water. I am afraid if we do nothing about it soon, we will find ourselves in the same situation as we did with electricity shortages,” said Nzimande.

The biggest problem, said Moloi, was the ageing infrastructure that was constructed in the 1970s, which was now costing taxpayers R4 billion annually to maintain.

Local government, housing and traditional affairs MEC Mike Mabusyakhulu said that while major strides had been made in the past three years in ensuring that people in KZN had access to water, an estimated 463 380 households still had no access to potable water.

“Compounding the situation is the fact that the province has mountainous terrain, which makes it difficult and costly to provide water to people,” said Mabusyakhulu.

“With the provincial unit cost of providing potable water per household estimated at R9 923, an estimated R4.5 billion will be required to serve an estimated 463 384 households with potable water.

“The estimated figure includes R2.2 billion available through the municipal infrastructure grant. It has also to be pointed out that the R4.5 bil-

lion excludes an estimated amount of R18 billion required for bulk infrastructure.

“Therefore, there is an estimated shortfall of more than R22.5 billion towards water service provision,” he said.

Guzzlers

Nzimande also warned of “water guzzlers”, such as commercial farms, mines and golf estates.

“But what is painful is the situation of rural communities like those around Jozini Dam, where water is not only used mainly for commercial farming but for leisure purposes. This is while locals do not have water even just for drinking,” he said.

Moloi said his department would implement phase two of the Mooi-Umgeni Transfer Scheme through the construction of the Spring Grove Dam on the Mooi River in an attempt to meet water demands in the major KZN industrial hubs.

The construction of this phase would cost R1.2 billion.

The department was also working on raising the capacity of Hazelmere Dam by installing radial gates to increase water storage and yields, at a cost of R120 million.

Moloi said alternative water sources – such as ground water, recycling and desalination – were also being considered.

