



Statement from Umgeni Water

Good progress has been made with implementation of project milestones for construction of an ultra-modern wastewater treatment plant in Mpophomeni, outside Pietermaritzburg.

The new plant, to be constructed at a cost of R389 million, will replace the existing plant there which has been decommissioned. Construction of two trunk mains will begin in January 2020 and is expected to be completed in 24 months, after which capacity-related problems being experienced at Mpophomeni Pump Station and Howick Wastewater Treatment Works will be significantly reduced.

At this stage Mpophomeni Pump Station outflow is transferred to Howick Wastewater Treatment Works; however, limited pipeline capacity of a maximum of three million litres per day is often the source of some of the problems that are experienced. Torrential rains over the past 10 days has exacerbated the problem: this had resulted in the storm dam at Mpophomeni filling rapidly.

When the storm dam gets full, its contents makes its way into three interlinked ponds at the Mpophomeni site. Spills in the past two days have emanated from the third pond and into a stream. A wetland situated between the Mpophomeni Pump Station and Midmar Dam had helped serve as natural filtration, thereby improving the quality of inflows into the dam.

On Tuesday this week there was a great deal of activity on social media after information circulated about sewage being sighted in Midmar Dam. Staff of Umgeni Water responded immediately and by Tuesday afternoon intensive disinfecting of the excess spills from Mpophomeni was being undertaken. Dosing will continue at the outlet of the pond to improve quality of outflow. As a medium-term mitigation measure, Umgeni Water will investigate the possibility of dredging the ponds in order to increase capacity.

There will also be regular sampling of water quality at the dam over the next few days.

Investigations conducted by staff of Umgeni Water on Monday and Tuesday this week show that some information that has been circulated on social media is far from the factual situation. Contrary to exaggerated claims on social media, the amount of effluent that made its way into the river system and the dam was small in quantity and unlikely to have any significant impact on water quality. The situation is not of serious proportions.

On Wednesday this week Umgeni Water increased sampling at the dam for the purpose of determining extent of nutrient and E.coli presence. The results of this sampling exercise will be known on Thursday. This is in addition to routine sampling Umgeni Water does at the dam – the most recent of which was on 14th November 2019 and E.coli presence was within acceptable range in the context of recreational purposes. It is important to note, at the same time, that water treated at and supplied from Midmar Water Works consistently meets the rigorous standards for SANS 241: 2015 for drinking water quality. In line with previous years, the potable water supplied from Midmar WW – and other water works operated and maintained by Umgeni Water – was again described as excellent and safe to drink.

When the new wastewater treatment plant is completed and commissioned, by 2022 if all goes according to schedule, the pipeline capacity and spill-related problems being experienced will almost completely be eradicated. The new plant will take pressure off the Howick plant by easing inflows by about 30%. It is also expected to unlock housing, business and industrial development in Mpophomeni and surrounding areas.

The wastewater treatment plant to be constructed in Mpophomeni is considered a developmental project, in that it is expected to create approximately 300 temporary jobs and also open opportunities for participation in construction and as suppliers and service providers by Black and women-owned enterprises. This is consistent with Umgeni Water's strategy relating to Contract Participation Goals that makes it mandatory for 35% of tender value to be allocated to targeted Black owned enterprises.

Issued by the Corporate Stakeholder Manager, Umgeni Water

