

Water resources in Mgeni System remain in healthy state as dams overflow

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The five dams and a weir in the Mgeni System are all overflowing, sending collective raw water storage in this system to a four-year high. The dams in the Mgeni System, the largest system in KwaZulu-Natal that provides for the water needs of approximately seven million consumers, are Spring Grove, Midmar, Albert Falls, Nagle and Inanda. The weir is Mearns. On Friday, 11th February 2022, the levels of the dams were:

- Spring Grove: 101%
- Midmar: 101%
- Albert Falls: 102%
- Nagle: 101%, and
- Inanda: 103%

Mearns Weir was at 117%.

The strong state of water resources in these dams and the weir has increased the amount water in storage in the Mgeni System to 102%, after being at 75% three months ago. The last time the collective storage in the Mgeni System was in excess of 100% was in March 2014, before the onset of a protracted drought a year later.

In the first two weeks of January 2022, good rains – in some instances amounting to 150 mm – were received in the catchments of Mearns, Spring Grove, Midmar, Nagle and Inanda. The catchments of Mearns, Spring Grove and Midmar are in the Southern Drakensberg. The current full-to-capacity state of Albert Falls has been as a result of heavy rains in its catchments and spills from Midmar Dam. The last time Albert Falls spilled was in May 2014, also a year before the drought.

Current storage in the Mgeni System, which supplies eThekweni Metro, uMgungundlovu District Municipality and Msunduzi Local Municipality, means there is sufficient water available to meet the full demands of these municipalities/Water Services Authorities for at least two years. Forecasts by the South African Weather Service show that more rainfall is expected in March and April 2022 which, if it occurs, will strengthen these dams' water resources.

While water adequacy is in a strong state, demand from municipalities has been increasing over the past four years. Increasing demand and inadequate water conservation among consumers could impact on water resources, resulting in the uninterrupted supply period being less than two years.

It is, therefore, imperative that demand is closely monitored and managed and water is used sparingly by consumers.

In the South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal, the four dams that are operated and managed by Umgeni Water – Umzinto, EJ Smith, Nungwane and Mhlabatshane – are all at 100% each. This means storage in the entire South Coast System is also at 100%. This system supplies Ugu District Municipality for reticulation to the Middle South Coast (Scottburgh, Pennington, Umzinto, Mhlabatshane and surrounding areas). Good rains in the Middle South Coast over the past four months have kept these dams in a state of full-to-capacity. There is adequate water available to meet the full demand of Ugu District Municipality well into 2023.

In the north of Durban, Hazelmere Dam, outside Verulam, is currently at 54% and iMvutshane Dam in Maphumulo is at 62%. Hazelmere Dam supplies eThekweni Metro and iLembe District Municipality while iMvutshane supplies iLembe District. There is sufficient water available to meet the full demands of both municipalities/Water Services Authorities.

Construction has begun to complete the remaining work for raising of the wall at Hazelmere Dam. At least 90% of the work to raise the height of the dam wall by 7 metres was completed in 2018. In December 2021, the contractor returned to site and the remaining 10% of the work is expected to be completed by November-December 2022. When the wall-raising project is completed, the dam storage capacity will be doubled, thereby reducing risk of water shortages occurring in future. In the meantime, the level of the dam has to be kept to 53%/54% for dam safety reasons and to avoid risk to the incomplete wall. In the first week of January 2022, Umgeni Water had to release water from Hazelmere Dam after it reached 62%.

The Home Farm Dam in Ixopo, within the Harry Gwala District, is at 104% following heavy rains during January 2022. There is adequate water available to meet the needs of Ixopo town and surrounding villages, all of which are supplied by Harry Gwala District Municipality.

