

Lesotho Highlands scheme gets the nod

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The R12bn phase two of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project (LHWP), which will secure a continued supply of water for SA and hydroelectric power for Lesotho, was approved in principle by the two countries this week.



Edna Molewa (Image: GCIS)

Tenders are likely to be issued late this year or early next year.

The project will be a boost for South African and Basotho construction and materials supply companies and should create thousands of jobs. It will also provide SA with much-needed water security, one of the challenges highlighted in the government's National Development Plan.

Water and Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa confirmed on Thursday (16 May) that the project would go ahead for completion by August 2020. Officials of her department said SA would bear the full R12bn cost, sharply higher than the initial R9bn estimate, and that the Trans-Caledon Tunnel Authority would obtain funds from various financial institutions.

Molewa said the additional water supply from Lesotho was earmarked for two major nodal developments planned for Lephalale near Vryburg, where new mines were being established, and for strategic infrastructure projects planned for Steelpoort.

According to the department, SA receives 24.6m³ of water per second from the LHWP.

An additional 45.5m³ per second would flow as a result of the expansion. The project would also generate 1,000MW of electricity for Lesotho.

Project welcomed

President of the South African Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors Norman Milne welcomed the decision, saying the industry had been waiting anxiously for announcements on strategic infrastructure projects.

Lesotho Prime Minister Thomas Thabane visited Pretoria on Monday (13 May) to finalise the agreement with President Jacob Zuma on the project after ministerial engagements at the weekend overcame Lesotho's outstanding concerns, which Molewa said related to energy supply for Lesotho, governance and the configuration of the project itself.

Molewa said the project involved the construction by SA of the Polihali Dam and connecting tunnels. Lesotho would build another new dam near Polihali and both dams would feed the existing Katse Dam, which would supply SA. The hydropower would be generated for Lesotho from these three dams. The agreement includes the measurement of water for SA.

Molewa said an additional phase would involve providing water to Botswana through the same channel as SA.

She said SA, Lesotho, Botswana and Namibia recently signed an agreement for an investigation into Botswana and Namibia also getting water from the scheme.

Source: Business Day via I-Net Bridge

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