

Drought hitting KwaZulu-Natal hard

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DURBAN: Drought conditions in KwaZulu-Natal are fast deteriorating with the provincial government on Thursday announcing more forceful measures in a bid to curtail water consumption.

KwaZulu-Natal's Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs MEC, Nomusa Dube-Ncube, urged residents to cut consumption.

A very serious situation



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"This province is facing a water crisis situation. It is necessary to increase restrictions and implement mandatory restrictions. We are talking about a very serious situation here," she told a press conference. She said water rationing would be implemented in certain areas across the province and users exceeding their allowed usage could be fined.

"It is not because of the mayors or the councillors. It is because we have no rain." Areas of the eThekweni and Ilembe District Municipality supplied from the Hazelmere Dam, various South Coast locations and northern KwaZulu-Natal have critically low dam levels.

In Ilembe, two sugars mills have not opened as the drought impacts on the sugar industry.

Ilembe and eThekweni consumers, supplied by the Hazelmere Dam, face penalties if they do not halve their water consumption. Dube-Ncube said the Hazelmere Dam treatment plant would not treat more water than had been allocated as per the restrictions. The dam only had enough water for 60 days. She said apart from Ilembe and eThekweni, other affected municipalities included the Ugu District Municipality, Uthukela District Municipality (Ladysmith) and Mkhanyakude District Municipality, Uthungulu District Municipality and Umzinyathi District Municipality.

Consumers in Durban and Pietermaritzburg supplied by Midmar, Albert Falls, Inanda and Springgrove Dams among others were not immediately facing water restrictions. However Dube-Ncube said as the drought worsened, restrictions could become more widespread across the province.

Looking at desalination plants to deal with water shortages

Both eThekweni and Ilembe were looking to build desalination plants as a long-term plan to deal with water shortages.

eThekweni Metro mayor James Nxumalo said the municipality had commissioned a feasibility study into building the plant. Ilembe District Mayor Sibusiso Mdabe said the municipality had already bought land and conducted an environmental impact assessment, but funding had to be addressed.

In Mkhanyakude District Municipality, numerous boreholes had reportedly failed while levels at the two main dams - Pongolapoort Dam and Hluhluwe Dam - had dropped substantially. In Mtubatuba water supply had been affected after the Umfolozi River dried up.

The MEC said in Kokstad and the surrounding areas, water restrictions had also been implemented with water supplied only during certain times of the day.

Severe impact on agriculture

She said the impact was being severely felt in the agricultural sector. The drought had reportedly affected almost 10,000 provincial farmers and stock losses were mounting with more than 30,000 cattle having been lost. She said 4,426 farmers, including 584 sugar cane farmers, had reported crop losses.

"Many farmers are financially stretched as a result of the increasing input costs and a protracted period of low returns on production and the impact of the dry conditions." Another 3,668 farmers had recorded cash crop losses and 174 recorded losses in vegetable yields as a result of the drought.

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