

# **Agriculture not the only culprit of unlawful water usage**

"Whilst unlawful water use by some irrigators is a concern that should be addressed, various other factors pose an even bigger threat to the availability and sufficiency of good quality water to society. It is, therefore, unfortunate that the irrigation sector was singled out as culprit with the launch of the National Water Week," says Johannes Möller, president of Agri SA.

The Department of Water Affairs had since the enactment of the National Water Act in 1998 failed to implement sections of this

legislation pertaining to the institutional capacity required to manage the country's water resources. "After 12 years the department only started in June 2010 with the verification and validation processes by appointing a professional service provider to assist them in addressing unlawful water use in the Vaal River system. This will only be completed in two years time," Möller says.

## **Water is used productively**

"Agri SA's views on unlawful water use were captured in a media release last year where we fully supported the department's efforts to eradicate unlawful water use practices in the Vaal River system as well as other activities which impact negatively on the country's water systems. However, the availability of water to other sectors of the economy was not jeopardized by transgressions of irrigators in the Vaal River system, due to generally good rainfall experienced the past few years.

Although the unlawful usage of surplus water should not be condoned, it should be noted that it was used productively, contributing to food production, job creation and economic welfare in rural areas," Möller adds.

## **Quality of water systems is deteriorating**

A NEDLAC report on water quality alluded comprehensively on the status of the country's water resources, which was submitted to the Minister of Water Affairs last year. The quality of various water systems in South Africa is in a poor condition and is deteriorating due to pollution by various sectors of the economy.

Waste water treatment works at municipal level are not up to standard and various water systems are seriously affected by mining activities. This is a concern from an ecological, agricultural as well as health perspective, requiring a holistic approach to stabilise and rectify this situation.

Agri SA is willing to work with the minister, her department and other role-players in the water sector with the view to protect and develop South Africa's scarce water resources to the best advantage of the country and its peoples. This is one aspect on the agenda to be discussed with the minister, hopefully in the near future.

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