

Water cuts a worry for farmers

Talking about nationalising things, did you know that water has been nationalised? In terms of the National Water Act, all water belongs to the nation. I ask because I have come across a case relating to the Inkomati water catchment area (one of nine across the country) in Mpumalanga, in terms of which farmers making use of irrigation have had their allocations cut by 40%.

The implication of this big reduction is that many farmers will be in trouble unless they can find crops that are less water-reliant or unless they can install methods of water delivery that are a lot more efficient than at present. It is a fact, I'm afraid, that agriculture uses more than 60% of the available water resource - and this number doesn't merely apply to SA. It is universal.

The sudden sharp reduction in the Inkomati catchment area will apply, presumably, in time if not immediately to the small-sized sugar cane farmers who were established in the region some years ago by TSB Sugar (formerly Transvaal Sugar). It was a large project designed precisely to give aspiring black farmers an avenue of success in the industry. But this sharp reduction is bound to have an effect, possibly severe, on the project as a whole.

Meanwhile, I am told by a water management expert that he thinks the Second National Water Resource Strategy is wishy-washy and internally inconsistent. In his view it's nothing more than a wish list of unobtainable objectives. He adds that the Department of Water and Environmental Affairs is withdrawing from its monitoring network, and you can't manage a tight resource without data.

Source: Business Day

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