

Western Cape still in grips of drought, but there is hope

Although the Western Cape has not seen the end of the dry spell yet, the agricultural sector is encouraged by the moderate rise in Western Cape dam levels.



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In the latest update on the state of South Africa's dams, water levels stood at 69.9% full on a national level as of 24 July 2017, which is much better than last year's 51.8% around the same time. The only exception is the Western Cape where dam levels have fallen below 50% full with the lack of rains delaying the planting of the winter crops.

"The Western Cape is still very much in the grips of the dry spell. The province continues with its water restrictions throughout all its regions. The winter rains have assisted slightly but have not had the desired impact as yet as the water levels remain critically low. The parts of the Western Cape that are 'non-winter' rain areas are in a far worse position. The only positive is that there has been a general one percentage point increase in dam levels across the Western Cape from the previous week," says Paul Makube, senior agricultural economist at FNB.

Water availability in winter rainfall areas is at 26.2% week-on-week versus last year's 50.4%. Dam levels in non-winter areas are at a critical low of 19.6% versus last year's 45.6%.

"The water level in Western Cape's biggest dam, the Thee Waters Kloof, has had a slight increase week-on-week at 20.9% full versus last year's 42.6%.

Previously anticipated El Niño weather pattern has diminished

"We expect the Western Cape to have decreased agricultural production due to the lack of significant rainfall. The knock on effect there could be lower seasonal employment in the agricultural sector. The recent relative good snowfall over the Western Cape mountains, will, however, be beneficial for dam levels as soon as warmer weather sets in. We also look forward to a recovery in non-winter areas of the Western Cape because the previously anticipated El Niño weather pattern has diminished, with neutral conditions slowly manifesting, implying a normal rainfall in the new production season ahead," concludes Makube.

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