

Environmental courts soon to try water polluters – Sonjica

Sapa

ENVIRONMENTAL courts would be established to address water crimes that threatened an already water-stressed nation, Water and Environmental Affairs Minister Buyelwa Sonjica said yesterday. “We are working closely with the SA Police Service and the Directorate of Public Prosecutions to address water crimes that threaten the security of supply to lawful water users,” Sonjica told the Agri SA water conference.

“We will invite you to the launch of the first courts in the near future. I understand that water pollution is one of the areas of great concern for the agricultural sector today.”

Water pollution is mainly caused by farming, mining,

industries and urban development. Unauthorised or illegal water abstraction has also been identified as a problem and the department is strengthening its enforcement capacity.

Sonjica said the capacity of her department’s compliance, monitoring and enforcement directorate, known as the Blue Scorpions, had increased significantly, and that 14 water management inspectors had been recruited and trained.

In the 2009/10 financial year, the department had issued 239 directives, of which 31 were “resolved positively” while 14 were pending in court.

The others were in the process of being resolved.

“We will intensify this aspect of our work to ensure that we bring to book all offenders.”

The minister urged farmers

to regulate their use of water as it could run out.

“Without effective regulation, your water may dry up or the quality may deteriorate significantly. The department is very concerned about the impact of deteriorating water quality on our water resources and on agriculture.”

She said the agricultural industry shared concern about the impact of poorly managed sewage systems on the quality of water used for irrigation.

Sonjica said the discharge of waste or waste water into a stream was only allowed if authorised by a water use licence or authorisation.

The department had therefore developed the Green Drop certification programme to address challenges in the municipal waste-water sector.



Water and Environmental Affairs Minister Buyelwa Sonjica urges farmers to save water. PHOTO: LEON NICHOLAS

“Currently we have more than 50 qualified assessors conducting consultative audits on the management of the waste-water treatment works.”

The 2009 Green Drop report

found that, of the 449 waste water service systems assessed against stringent criteria, 203 (45 percent) scored better than 50 percent. At least 7.4 percent of all waste water systems

were “excellently managed”

“We are well on our way to meet the 2010 target of assessing 100 percent of the municipal waste water treatment works.”

Cape Times - 12 August 2010