

23 February 2018

Dear Delegate

Water-wise events keep Cape Town open for business

Cape Town is renowned throughout the world, not only as a tourist destination, but also as a premier events destination, attracting large numbers of participants from across the country, and abroad. The current water crisis has resulted in event organisers and participants questioning whether they should still be coming to Cape Town over the next few months. There is a perception that hosting and attending these events will place additional strain on the City's water resources, and that supply should be saved for local consumption.

I would like to assure you that your participation will not have any detrimental impact on the water supply. Given the scale of the City's supply system, increased visitor numbers over a limited period of time (usually only a few days) will not have any noticeable impact on overall consumption.

In fact, staying away would be more detrimental, as these events and the jobs they support are a significant mainstay of Cape Town's economy. While we are undeniably experiencing a water crisis, it will only make matters worse if this spirals into an economic crisis.

It is possible to balance the sustainable supply of water with supporting our economy and creating employment.

The City is therefore working closely with organisers to ensure that all events have a minimal impact on municipal water usage.

In many instances, event organisers have proposed a number of innovative solutions to become completely water neutral. These measures include:

- the installation of rainwater tanks,
- small-scale desalination,
- reuse of grey water,
- use of chemical toilets,
- use of waterless hand sanitiser,
- use of biodegradable, disposable crockery and cutlery, and
- supplying water from outside the province.

The hospitality industry, which forms part of the events value chain, has also implemented significant measures to reduce consumption at their establishments, and all visitors staying at the various establishments are subject to the same water-saving measures as locals.

Such measures should not only be regarded as temporary, emergency measures. We all need to fundamentally reconsider our attitude to water. Saving water, finding innovative ways to use less or reuse it, needs to become entrenched in every aspect of our lives.

We are not alone in this. A survey conducted in 2014 of the world's 500 largest cities shows that one in four can be considered "water-stressed". Climate change, population growth and human activity all play a role in this. Our challenge is therefore to find ways of becoming more sustainable, more resilient.

In order to do this, the City of Cape Town is diversifying its water augmentation programme to reduce dependency on groundwater sources:

- In the short term, we will have 16ML/day desalination capacity up and running over the course of the next two months. This will come in the form of rented modular desalination plants that will operate over the next two years (until 2020). Significant preplanning is also underway to allow for fast-tracked implementation of larger-scale augmentation schemes in the long term.
- For the medium term, we are working to ramp up alternative water supply to over 200 ML per day before winter 2019, the bulk of which will come from aquifer abstraction, but will include desalination and water reclamation components. This, in conjunction with some level of continued water restrictions, will help our dams recover to the point where there is a reasonable buffer against further drought post 2020.
- In the longer term, i.e. post 2020, it is expected that the combination of augmentation schemes and the return of normal rainfall will have allowed the dams to recover significantly. We will continue to abstract groundwater as required, while ensuring that the aquifers are sufficiently recharged to avoid depleting them. A programme of large-scale permanent desalination and water reclamation plants will be ready to be fast-tracked if required.

Some level of water restriction may still be necessary during any droughts we experience beyond this date. It is therefore important that we continue to save water into the future.

The most effective way of doing this is through behaviour change. The City is driving a far-reaching programme to communicate the required behaviour change to its residents. Local businesses and other stakeholder groups are being engaged to assist in spreading the message. The events and hospitality industries play a crucial role in disseminating the message to visitors, and encouraging them to "save like a local".


We cannot allow this crisis to define us, but the way in which we respond to it will be our defining moment.

So, I would like to urge event organisers to put the following message out there: Cape Town is open for business. The events industry provides enormous economic benefit to the local economy, and we cannot afford to jeopardise this due to misinformation about the realities of our water situation.

We welcome your support, and the visitors you bring to our city. We welcome your willingness to come forward with solutions to save water, and we admire the innovative proposals we are seeing.

Let us keep working together to make progress possible.

Yours faithfully



Alderman Ian Neilson
Executive Deputy Mayor, City of Cape Town