

## **PRESS RELEASE:**

### **Load shedding adds last straws to looming SA water crisis; but there is hope**

South Africa is approaching a water crisis as load shedding adds undue pressure to water and wastewater treatment systems already on the verge of collapse. However, there is still hope that South Africans can work together to find solutions.

This is according to water and wastewater treatment experts on the advisory board of the upcoming IFAT Africa trade fair for water, sewage, refuse and recycling in Southern Africa, which will be staged at Gallagher Estate, Johannesburg, from 5 -7 July.

Benoît Le Roy, Environmental, Technology & Project Alchemist, says a lack of cohesion between local and national government in meeting policy objectives such as the NDP 2030, NIP 2050 and 2018 Water & Sanitation Master Plan has exacerbated the problem of decades of crumbling infrastructure. He says: “If leadership is unable to steer the ship, it doesn’t matter what’s happening in the boiler room. We need a catch-up. Billions in funding is needed just to make a dent in the water asset rejuvenation that is needed. We need to put more money into the water sector. Of 1 000 or so sewage plants, 97% do not comply with their licences and are putting water resources at risk. What we are seeing is a disconnect between national and local government and a systemic collapse of our water security. If water systems fail completely, it would be the end of life as we know it.”

The Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) 2022 Green Drop report noted that sewage spillages and failing wastewater treatment works were a cause of great concern, with many systems achieving scores below 31%. Green Drop Reporting aligns with incentive-based regulation and provides accurate data on the status of wastewater services in South Africa. No Department of Public Works (DPW) region qualified for Green Drop status and 102 of the 115 DPW systems were identified as being in critical state.

The Blue Drop report for 2022, which assesses water services, found that while 48% of water supply systems are in the low risk category, 18% are at medium risk, 11% are at high risk and 23% are in the critical risk category. Poor water quality compliance results were highlighted as a serious concern to DWS.

Hennie Pretorius, Industry Manager Water and Wastewater at Endress+Hauser South Africa, says the country’s deteriorating water treatment and supply situation is worsened by load shedding. “Long outages cause water shortages

because reservoirs only have so much buffer capacity, and areas run out of capacity. Older pumps and drives aren't made to be suddenly switched off and on as we see in unexpected outages. So, the power crisis is standing tall as a major challenge."

"On top of that, the latest Blue Drop and Green Drop reports indicated that while there were isolated improvements, overall there is still a lack of maintenance and a deterioration and growing pollution of surface water. There is also a drastic skills shortage of water and wastewater professionals. Municipal process controllers may have the will to properly maintain plants, but they don't have the funding," Pretorius says.

Eric Bruggeman, CEO of the SA Capital Equipment Export Council (SACEEC), a 164-member public private partnership between the South African Department of Trade, Industry and Competition and the capital equipment and related services industries, says load shedding is a major problem, but just one of many facing manufacturers in the sector. "Companies are battling to get parts and material in, water systems are failing, ports and harbours aren't working and goods must be taken by road, so costs have become higher."

### **Reasons for optimism**

Despite these challenges, Bruggeman says SACEEC members are enjoying a bumper year. "The good news is our members that are exporting broke all records this year. China is battling – it can't deliver, there are not enough containers, and the rand dollar/pound has gone through the roof, so many countries are finding it cheaper to buy from South Africa. Right now, South Africans are making the most of the situation."

"South Africans are incredibly resilient. We must have some of the best entrepreneurs in the world, because they are performing against all odds. For every piece of bad news there's good news and major exporters are smiling at the moment. But for industry to grow and the smaller, newer businesses to survive too we also need reliable electricity, water, roads and infrastructure – and the government needs to come to the party," he says.

Bruggeman says the infrastructure challenges, along with younger employees driving a green agenda, has seen green manufacturing starting to take off in South Africa. "A lot of our manufacturers are looking at renewable power, more efficient water usage, greener materials, and lower emissions. They are using more technologies to become more efficient and greener," he says.

Le Roy believes South Africa has to reindustrialise its water sector to be able to re-establish itself as a regional and continental powerhouse in the water sector.

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He also sees opportunities for water reuse, desalination and digitalisation to improve water security.

Pretorius agrees: “For South Africa, desalination offers an important opportunity to mitigate water scarcity. Network management, reducing water loss, management of sewer networks and pump stations will also improve the situation, as will aligning with global trends such as water resource management, surface water monitoring, and digitalisation of information and making it available from a central point.”

IFAT Africa will be co-located with analytica Lab Africa – the only South African trade fair for laboratory technology, analysis, biotechnology and diagnostics. The co-location brings together the broad and integrated spectrum of science and innovation, laboratory technology, water treatment, waste management and recycling for one-stop access to the interconnected value chains in these sectors. The market response to co-locating the event with IFAT Africa has been resoundingly positive, with visitors and exhibitors from across Africa and around the world exploring multi-sectoral business opportunities.

IFAT Africa offer access to thousands of industry decision makers from across the African continent and the world. The supporting programme of presentations and workshops will be designed to bring together government, academia, scientists and business to engage, explore solutions and drive the pace of change. Registration to visit the exhibition is open. To book a stand or register to visit go to <https://ifat-africa.com>