

Water levels drop below half in three provinces

The current hot temperatures in major parts of the country have plunged three provinces to stress levels as their dam levels dropped to below half in the past two weeks.



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According to the Department of Water and Sanitation report, the dam levels in Limpopo, Eastern Cape and North West has plummeted to below 50% in two weeks, amid fears that the situation may deteriorate unless it starts raining heavily soon.

The Eastern Cape and North West provinces' dam levels have dropped to below 50%, few days after Limpopo plunged to 49.8% last week.

The Joe Gqabi district, with eight towns under its jurisdiction, is the latest to join the drought-stricken areas in the Eastern Cape. The Orange River which runs through Aliwal North, Ugie, Mount Fletcher, Mclean, Lady Grey, Barkly East and Burgersdorp, is completely dry and most of the affected towns now rely on groundwater and water tankering.

Provincial disaster

Last week, the provincial government declared the water situation in the province a provincial disaster, which means that water funding is now prioritised to avert a total catastrophe.

Limpopo continued on a downward spiral of its dam levels, with Tzaneen Dam in the Mopani District dropping to 5.9%. Middel Letaba which supplies Greater Giyani, is virtually empty at 3%.

“Given this desperate situation in the citrus fruit town, it is a matter of time before severe water restrictions, including abstraction for irrigation, are introduced,” the department said.

At 52.7%, the department warned that KwaZulu-Natal is likely to join the fray soon, with parts of the province already experiencing severe dry conditions.

“Ugu district on the South Coast is distressed, with Harding, a small town off the coast, the hardest hit. The local dam has virtually dried up and residents are now dependent on tankered water and groundwater,” the department said.

Other towns that are experiencing water challenges are Mahlabathini, Nongoma and Ulundi in the hinterland of Zululand, the department added.

“With the blistering heat causing the country to lose an average one percent of water a week, South Africans are crossing their fingers for heavy rains to start coming down sooner rather than later to avert a potential catastrophe in some regions.”



Panic over water in South Africa's economic hub is misplaced

Mike Muller 28 Oct 2019



No need to panic

Despite the mounting fears, Human Settlements, Water and Sanitation Minister Lindiwe Sisulu has assured South Africans that there was no need to panic “as long as water users used it wisely and sparingly until the normal summer rainfall”.

“The availability of water is in the hands of its consumers if they reduce their consumption to acceptable levels,” Sisulu said.

The minister was supported in her assertion by climate change scientists who projected above normal (heavy) rains between the months of December 2019 and February 2020. However, the misfortune with these is that they include localised flooding.

It is predicted that the current hot temperatures are likely to continue until the end of summer, with the exception of the Western Cape, which has received heavy winter downpours since May.

The rest of the country has had sporadic rainfalls that have made little or no impact on the dam levels.

South Africa receives 450 millimetres of rain a year, which is half the world rainfall.

Sisulu said this can only mean that South Africans must increase their water conservation efforts and change their consumption patterns of this scarce resource in order to cope with the situation.