



Water crisis: WCape declared a disaster area – Helen Zille

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Premier initiates project 'Avoid Day Zero', says declaration will accelerate project and ensure taps do not run dry

Premier Zille declares Western Cape a disaster area – initiates project “Avoiding Day Zero”

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Premier Helen Zille has officially declared the Western Cape a disaster area in response to the current drought crisis – the worst since 1904.

“The disaster declaration will accelerate the Western Cape Disaster Management Centre’s Project “Avoiding Day Zero”, the Province’s strategy to ensure that taps do not run dry,” said Premier Zille.

The declaration will be formally gazetted during the course of this week, and was signed by the Premier during a Cabinet meeting last week. As it stands, the disaster will be classified for a 3 month period which can be extended, if the need arises.

During such a classification, the Disaster Management Act empowers the provincial government to protect key frontline service delivery points by reprioritising funding.

Project “Avoiding Day Zero”, led by the Western Cape’s Provincial Disaster Management Centre (PDMC), has 3 focus areas:

1. Demand management – managing the current water supply from the respective sources;
2. Winter conservation – ensuring that water resources are properly managed, despite a rise in dam levels during the rainy season. This avoids a disaster during the dry months; and
3. Groundwater management – ensuring the proper management of groundwater sources like boreholes or the Table Mountain aquifer.

Government will prioritise interventions based on the provincial Drought Risk Register. Provincial Disaster Management will focus on the most critical aspects of that list. Funding will be reprioritised provincially and, should further assistance be needed, the province will approach National Treasury and the National Department of Water and Sanitation.

According to Provincial Disaster Management, the most immediate interventions, in the coming days will be:

The drilling of boreholes at hospitals, starting in the metro, to be followed by schools in high-risk water scarce areas.

- Expediting the Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) for:

Testing a mobile desalination plant using existing water inlet flows used for the reactors at the Koeberg site;

Drilling into the Table mountain aquifer;

- Appointing groundwater specialists in each district. The specialists will identify main ground water sources and coordinate the exploration and management of these resources going forward.

- Assessing state of water restrictions in the respective municipalities – while local councils remain responsible for making area-specific decisions, the disaster declaration enables the Province to issue instructions for any changes to these restrictions that may be necessary in each locality.

During the current declaration period, a provincial inter-ministerial committee – chaired by Minister Anton Bredell – will meet regularly to assess immediate threats and recommend interventions.

In the last year, at least R27 million has already been re-prioritised for interventions in areas which were declared local disasters. In January 2016, parts of the West Coast and Central Karoo were declared agricultural drought disaster areas. Hydrological disasters were declared in Prince Albert, Witzenberg and Oudtshoorn. Through our interventions, all of these localities are no longer deemed as disaster areas.

Our government wishes to assure the public that the declaration is no cause to panic. A disaster declaration enhances control by affording the Province additional powers of intervention.

We urge all residents to continue with the current water saving measures and to adhere to restrictions imposed in their respective municipalities.

While it remains a cause for concern, we believe the current drought is an opportunity to innovate and act responsibly in the way we make use of our water resources.

Issued by Michael Mpofu, Spokesperson for Premier Helen Zille, 22 May 2017