

# Strategic framework for water services

'Water is life,  
sanitation is dignity'

**E**ight years after the *White Paper on Water Supply and Sanitation* was published (November 1994), the National Cabinet approved the Strategic Framework for Water Services on 17 September 2003 (hereafter the Framework). Much has been achieved and the *White Paper* was used as departure point in formulating the Framework, but since 1994 the context has changed significantly.

Factors such as the local government transformation, new water policies and the new public finance framework have forced the national Department of Water and Forestry to draft the new Framework.

The Framework provides a comprehensive summary of the policy of the water services sector and sets out a strategic framework for the policy's implementation over the next ten years.

The water services sector is understood to refer to water supply and sanitation services and includes regional water schemes, local water schemes,

on-site sanitation and the collection and treatment of wastewater.

## **Purpose and aim of the Framework**

The purpose of the Framework is to put forward a vision for the water services sector for the next ten years and to set out the framework that will enable the sector vision to be achieved.

The Framework aims to align policies, legislation and strategies of the water services sector.

- *Policies* are understood to be the documents establishing the vision, overall goals and approach.
- *Legislation* creates an enabling environment.
- *Strategies* set out the detail of how the policies will be implemented in order to achieve the vision and goals.

## **Sector vision, goals and targets**

The water services sector's vision is embodied in the slogan, "Water is life, sanitation is dignity". The Framework highlights seven sector goals, of which the following are fundamental:

- all people living in South Africa must have access to an appropriate, acceptable, safe and affordable basic water supply and sanitation services;
- water and sanitation services must be provided equitably, affordably, effectively, efficiently, sustainably and in a gender-sensitive fashion; and
- the price of water and sanitation services must reflect the fact that they are both social and economic goods.

Access to these services, hygiene education and health, free basic services and institutional development and performance are listed as targets in the Framework.

The targets set exceed those set as millennium development goals and their achievement will require a concrete and collaborative effort from all role players.

# key points

- A Strategic Framework for Water Services was approved by National Cabinet in September 2003 to address changes in the water and sanitation sector since 1994 due to the local government transformation and the adoption of new legislation (Water Services Act, 1997 & National Water Act, 1998) and policies (National Water Policy for South Africa, 1997).
- The Water Services Sector is defined as a sector involved in water supply and sanitation services and includes regional water schemes, local water schemes, on-site sanitation and the collection and treatment of wastewater.

## Key policy themes

The key policy themes in the Framework are as follows:

- eliminating the backlog in basic services provision – the first step;
- providing higher levels of service – stepping up the ladder;
- free basic water supply and sanitation services;
- a credit control vision to ensure a compassionate local government system;

- institutional reform of water services providers (including water boards);
- decentralised fiscal framework via the three consolidated local government grant mechanisms – municipal infrastructure grant, equitable share and the capacity building grant;
- a long-term vision for regulation, namely an independent regulatory function focusing on economic regulation;
- key support mechanisms such as knowledge networks and advisory services; and
- monitoring systems for policy implementation, planning, support and regulation.

## Conclusion

The Framework is an umbrella framework for the water services sector (water supply and sanitation) as a whole.

This Framework is necessary to give clarity to sector role players covering a wide spectrum of areas, such as governance, institutional reform, finances, tariffs, planning, norms and standards, regulation and support.

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**Editor's comment:** After working through the Framework one is left with two impressions: first, that it does not respect the current legislative framework for local government (especially its autonomy); and second, that while the differences between the Framework and the *White Paper* are explained, the relationship between them is not.