

Government to spend millions on water projects

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The government is to spend close to R400 million to ensure that major KwaZulu-Natal industrial hubs such as Durban and Pietermaritzburg have enough water.

This is in response to fears that massive residential and industrial developments are putting pressure on the provincial water resources.

Projections by Umgeni Water – which supplies eight major municipal hubs – suggested there was likely to be a 3.1 percent annual increase in water demands by its customers over the next five years.

After electricity shortages, fears have been expressed that this could extend to water.

These fears are attributed to a number of factors such as massive demand as a result of industrial and residential developments coupled with erratic weather patterns brought about by global warming.

Umgeni Water's corporate stakeholder manager, Shami Harichunder, said the expected increase in demand over the next five years was consistent with the projections of the utility in its 30-year plan.

"This has factored in increases due to (such effects as) buoyant economic growth, population increase and a higher number of consumers in our supply area moving a step higher on the water ladder through their use of larger volumes per household," said Harichunder.

The utility's customers – the eThekweni Municipality, iLembe, uMgungundlovu, Ugu and Sisonke district municipalities and the Msunduzi Local Municipality – have millions of residential and industrial customers.

Harichunder said the water utility had an obligation to supply its customers at a 99 percent assurance of supply for the Mngeni system and

98 percent for the Mdloti system.

"Due to the growth in water demand that has occurred in the past years, the current levels of supply are at 95 percent of assurance for the Mngeni system.

"The Mdloti system is due to reach this level in the next few years.

"Although it is less than 98 percent, it still remains as high as assurance of supply.

"This does not mean that the systems are failing, but rather that the risk of disruption to supply has increased marginally. This situation can only be restored either through augmenting the water resources or by reducing the demand," Harichunder said.

He said Umgeni Water and the department of water affairs and forestry, working together to ensure increased assurance of supply, had plans in place to mitigate these risks.

On the Mdloti system, the Hazelmere Dam wall, near Verulam, is

to be raised by seven metres, at a cost of about R35 million, by the department of water affairs and forestry.

The dam will be the source of supply to the proposed Dube Trade Port and new international airport as well as to the rapidly growing urban areas to the north of Durban.

The department of water affairs and forestry is the

custodian of water resources and has the responsibility of planning and implementing augmentation schemes.

There has been an acknowledgement of the importance of undertaking both augmentation schemes as a matter of urgency.

"Once completed, the augmentation schemes will restore assurance of supply to 99 percent for the Mngeni System and 98 percent for the Mdloti System.

"Planning is under way for augmentation beyond these schemes.

"The successful implementation of the demand initiatives within the supply area is also key to minimising the risk of water shortages," said Harichunder.

