

BERG RIVER IMPROVEMENT PLAN

WATER AND JUSTICE FROM AN ECONOMIC PERSPECTIVE

The Berg River Improvement Plan is endorsed by the Western Cape Government (WCG) and serves as a platform for collaboration between all spheres of government as well as role players and stakeholders to respond to the National Development Plan (NDP), Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF), Green Economy Framework, Provincial Strategic Outcomes and Growing the Cape 2040.

The Berg River Improvement Plan (BRIP) was developed as a transversal plan, to address water quality concerns in the Berg River. This programme has now been extended to include the Breede River Environmental Resources Protection Plan (BRERPP).

The Berg and Breede River Catchments are home to cultivated agricultural land, mainly vineyards and fruit trees.

A workshop, "Water and Justice from an Economic Perspective", was held on 7 November 2017.

The purpose of the workshop was to enable the attendees to some of the thinking on associated ethics, the cultural ideas on water of the people of one of our predominant African language groups, as well as rigorous water and economics study.

Four speakers addressed these areas on the water resource.

The first speaker, Fr Peter John, representing South African Faith Communities, spoke on water and justice and provided advice to those present, particularly addressing people from government. He answered the question, "What is the meaning of water and justice in policy?"

He encouraged people in government to ensure that the water governance policies which are crafted, have an underlying concept of the importance of accessible water to all. Justice needs to be the lens, he recommends with a fundamental principle of the ethic of sharing the water resource.

The ethic of consulting people on the water resource is now considered to be of importance. He raised the question as to why we need justice in the water sector in government. The reason he gave was that our words need to have authenticity in government - our words need to be dependable words. Simultaneously he advises, there needs to be the opportunity for communities to engage in water issues, enabling greater depth and synergies to be built in society.

James Cullis of Aurecon, was the second speaker talking on the economic risks and solutions associated with declining water quality due to urbanisation, with a case study on the Breede River Catchment. This presentation was based on a paper, where the Water Institute of Stellenbosch University is also partnering, that is currently

under review with a local scientific journal, and the work is based on funding from the DEA&DP.

James addressed rapid rates of urbanisation, particularly in informal settlements, as well as needed investment in Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) in the Breede River Catchment. He outlined that when you have scarce resources you need to look at economic indicators, such as building development and population growth to see where to focus.

In the Breede River Catchment, he outlined, that in this study, the status of the Waste Water Treatment Works in terms of the green drop status have been assessed and not all plants need to be rehabilitated to the same level.

Climate change modelling indicated that the Western Cape will be at greatest risk for declining water flows in catchments, as compared with other regions of South Africa. He asked what would happen to water quality in the Breede River if we do not have water flows from the dams in the catchment to do releases into the system.

Carel Davids from Lyners Consulting, spoke on the feasibility study on water reuse to potable water from waste water treatment works in the Drakenstein Municipality. The outcome of the research focuses on a possible pilot water reuse to potable water plant.

Paarl and Wellington are located in a water scarce area. Prolonged droughts and lower average rainfall in future is regarded by many as the new normal. Drakenstein Municipality is reliant on terrestrial water largely from Wemmershoek Dam which is managed by the City of Cape Town. Drakenstein Municipality needs to consider water re-use as an additional water resource to ensure sustainability, improvement of socio economic conditions and economic growth.

Mphuthumi Ntabeni (Mpush) spoke on **"The Broken River Tent"**, his inaugural novel to be released in all major bookshops early in 2018.

In Mpush's historical novel, *The Broken River Tent*, the leading character, sits on a hill above Algoa Bay, Port Elizabeth where he communes with Chief Maqoma. The character is then transported to the world of Chief Maqoma to experience the life of the Xhosa people of the time. Maqoma's rich land with cool valleys, which are now citrus farms, is surrounded by the mountain ranges of the Katberg, Hogsback and Winterberg, and tributaries run through which become the Katberg River.

There is a special relationship between the Xhosa people and river water which is one of the themes in the book that developed further. The Xhosa people always settled on the river banks and relied on the natural flooding of the rivers for the watering of the fields.

The workshop *Water, Justice - from an Economics Perspective*, provided the opportunity for the delegates to understand the connectedness between population growth and urban growth and its impacts on water quality.

In turn there is a flow on to the economy of reduced water quality that has been quantified, using the Breede Catchment as a case study. The feasibility of providing additional potable water from waste water treatment effluent, while also improving water quality has been presented as one of the solutions. This has been shown against a background of the cultural linkages between our largest African language speakers, the Xhosa people and river water, as well as the ethic that this water resource needs to be shared. There is a symbol of hope in what has been presented, which gives us a way forward.

Economic and population growth is expected to continue and yet with good legislation that supports the provision of water to all, and using modern technology, we have strategies for the provision of the limited water resource to the broader community.



Left to right: Annabel Horn, Carel Davids, Fr Peter-John Pearson, James Cullis and Mphuthumi Ntabeni.