

South Africa joins water lobby organisation

South Africa joined the public-private international water lobby organisation Water Resources Group (WRG) alongside Jordan, Mexico, the State of Karnataka, in India, and private organisations, including Nestlé and the World Economic Forum (WEF), on May 5, 2011.

With water demand in South Africa set to rise by 52% within the next 30 years, Water and Environmental Affairs Minister **Edna Molewa** and WRG chairperson and Nestlé chairperson **Peter Brabeck-Letmathe** signed the declaration of partnership on the sidelines of the WEF on Africa, held in Cape Town.

The influential public-private international network on water is supported by the WEF and the International Finance Corporation.

"This partnership between the government of South Africa and the WRG will help identify how South Africa's plans for growth can be met with the water it has safely available. The foresight and leadership of Minister Molewa in this regard should be applauded," remarked Brabeck-Letmathe.

The expected growth in water demand in South Africa is exacerbated by the sharp decline in the supply of water. If current trends of leakage from aged and poorly maintained municipal infrastructure and the loss of wetlands persist, this growth in demand will intensify competition for water resources across all agriculture, energy, industry and domestic sectors of the economy, the WRG states.

"Should the status quo in management practices continue, a gap of 17% between water demand and supply is forecast by 2030.

This gap will have serious social and political implications and strongly impact South Africa's plans for economic growth," the WRG notes.

"The partnership will enable South Africa to access best practice economics, projects and policies in water management from public, private and civil society sectors around the world, enabling officials to field-test and replicate actions for implementation domestically," explained WEF senior director and head of environmental initiatives **Dominic Waughray**, who is also a member of the WRG.

The group will focus on key areas, including water conservation and demand management, to improve efficient water use in agriculture, industry and households, and reduce leakage from distribution networks, including irrigation.

The WRG also aims to diversify the country's water mix by increasing the reuse of effluent, desalinated water and acid mine drainage, and develop more sustainable management of groundwater resources, in particular, for rural areas.

The partnership will deliver two primary outputs. First, it will assist the Department of Water Affairs to develop sector water strategies for agriculture, energy and industry.

Further, each sector strategy will identify a pipeline of potential projects and assess their collective potential to close the water volume gap if implemented, identify challenges for project replication and recommend a strategy to overcome challenges, including incentives for widespread adoption and stakeholder contribution that enables replication.