

Joining Hands to Manage SA's Water Resources

After many years in the making, South Africa launched its first catchment management agency (CMA) for the Inkomati River water management area last year. This year, the Department of Water Affairs & Forestry (DWAF) plans to establish several more agencies, including the Usutu to Mhlathuze and Thukela CMAs in KwaZulu-Natal, the Gouritz and Breede CMAs in the Western Cape, and the Olifants CMA in Mpumalanga/Limpopo. Lani van Vuuren investigates the opportunities and challenges of this move to decentralise decision making to manage South Africa's water resources for the benefit of all.

Why CMAs? Internationally, there is an increased move towards the integrated management of all water resources at regional or catchment level, involving all roleplayers in the decision-making process, explains water law expert Hubert Thompson. "DWAF should be the custodian of the water resources with the mandate to ensure that the water resources are protected, used, developed, conserved, managed and controlled in a socially equitable and economically beneficial and sustainable manner in the long term for the benefit of all people in South Africa."

"The main functions associated with this are the developing of policy, facilitating the implementation thereof and overseeing the activities of all water resource management institutions. Other water resource management functions, such as monitoring and regulating the use of the water resources, need to be assigned or delegated to other institutions."

"The intention is for water resources management, among others, to meet the basic human needs of present and future generations; promote equitable access to water; redress the results of past racial and gender discrimination and facilitate social and economic development,"

Thompson tells *the Water Wheel*. "The CMA is a mechanism to unite opposing opinions towards this integrated management of our country's water resources."

The National Water Act makes provision for the phased establishment of CMAs covering all 19 water management areas in South Africa to fulfil the monitoring and regulating water resources management functions currently performed by DWAF. This does not necessarily mean that there will be 19 CMAs. As the phasing in of CMAs progresses, it might be necessary to redefine the different water management areas, Thompson points out. "It is important to realise that this is an evolutionary process, unique in the world, and we are learning as we go along."

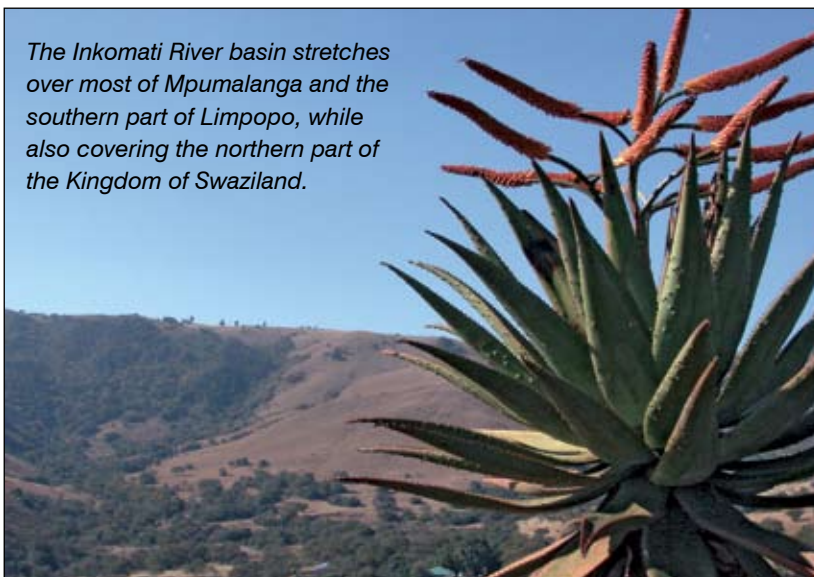
Broadly, the initial role of a CMA is investigate and advise interested persons on the managing of the water resources in the water management area, coordinate the functions of other institutions involved in water-related matters (such as local government institutions and water user associations), and to involve local communities in the management of the water resources. Every CMA must establish a catchment management strategy (CMS) that



"We are all children of the same river," believes Sizile Ndlovu, CEO of the Inkomati CMA.



The Inkomati River basin stretches over most of Mpumalanga and the southern part of Limpopo, while also covering the northern part of the Kingdom of Swaziland.

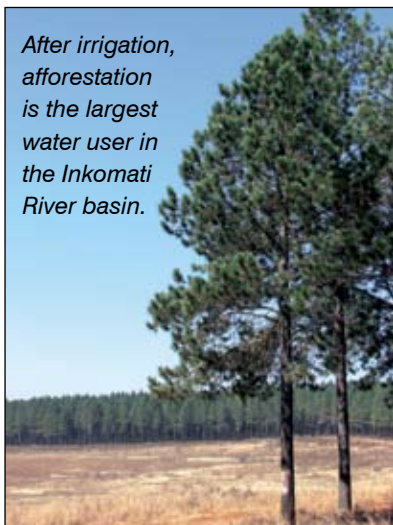


The Nkomati is an international river, originating in South Africa (near Carolina), flowing partly through Swaziland and transversing Mozambique.

sets out the framework for managing water resources within that specific area and the principles for allocating water to existing and prospective water users.

The strategy must also set out the water management institutions to be established in the area, and guide these institutions in performing their functions. The CMS will have to align with key programmes of government, particularly in support of job creation,

After irrigation, afforestation is the largest water user in the Inkomati River basin.



poverty eradication and sustainable social and economic development.

Depending on the size and capacity of a CMA, other powers and duties may be assigned or delegated to it by the Minister. This may include general management of water resources in the water management area, developing policy and strategy, supporting other institutions, regulating and authorising the use of water, implementing water resources infrastructure, managing information and auditing water resources management.

"One must realise that despite some of these duties being delegated to the CMA, the Minister, as the custodian of South Africa's water resources, will ultimately remain responsible for the management of the nation's water. Therefore, the relationship between DWAF and the CMA will inevitably be a close one, with the department monitoring whether the CMA is carrying out its functions effectively," says Thompson. The structure of a CMA to be established will depend on factors such as water resource challenges and priorities, demographics, type of water use and water-related capacity in the water management area.

Is a CMA just another regional DWAF department? Certainly not, says Eustathia Bofilatos, Director of WMIG

at DWAF. "While a CMA is an organ of state it is not part of the three spheres of government. Rather than being extensions of the department, CMAs are legal entities with their own identity." Thompson adds that the functions of DWAF and CMAs are also different. DWAF is the custodian of South Africa's water resources, while the CMA will be regulators regulating the use of water.

A CMA is managed by a governing board, appointed by the Minister, and representative of roleplayers in the water management area. A CMA will appoint the necessary staff to carry out its tasks and some members of staff of regional DWAF offices may be transferred to the CMA.

CMAS AND MUNICIPALITIES

Bofilatos emphasises the importance of the relationship between CMAs and the water users or stakeholders in the catchment, especially municipalities. "It is critical that municipalities prioritise interaction with CMAs, as a number of their functions will be dependent on relations with them, particularly the water services function."

"CMAs have no function in the provision of water services, but they can be a means to effective provision of this service by local government," Bofilatos continues. "Municipalities need to align their infrastructure development plans (IDPs) and water sector development plans with the catchment management strategy."

In the areas where the CMA process has been initiated, water users have generally welcomed the prospect of participating in water resources management decisions. However, effective awareness and education strategies around what water resources management entails, and the responsibility this places on all water users, are crucial.

WHAT IS IWRM?

Integrated water resources management is an accepted and practiced international principle to manage water, land and related resources to maximise resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of vital ecosystems.

Ma Tshepo Khumbane is the founder of the Water for Food Movement, an organisation that assists communities to stave off hunger by harnessing rainwater and growing food productively. She has actively participated in the consultation process of the Olifants CMA. "Local communities are invited to attend stakeholder meetings. People come and listen, then go home and forget, because they do not understand what water resources management is and what role they are to play in it."

"Communities need to be empowered through education and awareness. They need to realise that they have just as much say as traditionally powerful stakeholders, such as industries and commercial farmers. Awareness campaigns can also make them realise the potential benefits of the establishment of a CMA, such as the reallocation of water to emerging farmers," notes Khumbane.

CATCHMENT MANAGEMENT IN THE INKOMATI

Leading the way is the Inkomati CMA, officially launched in November last year. The CMA has become the key water resources management body within a highly contested institutional environment. Local and provincial government, traditional leaders, water user associations, international water bodies, sector representative bodies, non-governmental organisations and other interest groups all want to influence, cooperate and/or dictate



Irrigated agriculture is the mainstay of the economy of the Inkomati River basin.

the way in which water resources are managed within the catchment.

The Nkomati River basin comprises three major catchments, the Komati, Crocodile and the Sabie-Sand, as well as two smaller catchments, the Nwaswitsontso and the Nwanedzi (the latter two rivers fall entirely within the Kruger National Park). All the rivers in the water management area flow into the Nkomati, a transboundary river, which crosses Swaziland and traverses Mozambique, entering the Indian Ocean near Marracuene.

There are many competitive water users within the basin, and demand already outstrips supply. At present, commercial agriculture, including crops such as sugarcane, citrus and sub-tropical fruits, is the main water user in the catchment, followed by forestry. Eskom also abstracts more than 100 million m³ of water a year from the Nkomati River basin for its power stations on the Highveld.

In addition to these competitive water uses, ecological water needs to be released as a non-consumptive base-flow for the maintenance of riverine and aquatic ecosystems in all three main sub-catchments of the Nkomati River basin. South Africa also needs to meet its international obligations in ensuring that Mozambique receives its fair share of the water.

While domestic consumption only constitutes a small percentage of water

use in the basin, this is likely to change in future. Several thousand households, especially those living in former homeland areas still do not have access to safe water and sanitation, requiring urgent intervention. In addition, previously disadvantaged farmers do not represent a significant proportion of irrigated agriculture in the basin. The re-allocation of water to especially emerging farmers and households for productive purposes is thus seen as an important task for the near future.

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As the mediator between all of these stakeholders, the Inkomati CMA has a crucial role to play in promoting a culture of dialogue among water users to ensure that water resources within the basin are shared sustainably and equitably. “It is extremely important that the agency is not seen to be taking sides,” reports CEO Sizile Ndlovu. “The agency must understand the needs of the people and balance expectations realistically.”

Building a relationship with all stakeholders has been an essential part of this process. Separate meetings are held regularly with different water users, such as the nine provincial and local authorities, commercial farming

groups, the Kruger National Park and tribal authorities. The CMA has also initiated outreach programmes targeting rural poor, emerging farmers as well as women and the youth. The main aim of these programmes is to raise awareness about the existence of the agency, as well as to institutionalise the idea of collective water resources management. “We need to make certain that those who were never able to take part in the decision making process now have a voice,” explains Ndlovu.

A process of verifying and validating existing use has been initiated as part of the compulsory licensing process. The CMA is also busy updating hydrology data to enable the assessment of water availability.

At a strategic level, the agency has started developing its catchment management strategy. It is proving a cumbersome process as all local government IDPs, the provincial growth and development plans, and the plans of national departments need to be reflected in the strategy.

Ndlovu believes that CMAs are the best way to ensure the sustainable development of South Africa's water resources for the benefit of all. “By engaging with stakeholders at a local level, CMAs can really get to grips with the needs and opportunities within a catchment, something which is very difficult to achieve within a national department.”

His vision for the Inkomati CMA is to become an institution for the people. “Water resources management is not about engineering and science, it is about people, and their relationship with one another and with the resource on which they depend.”

“The ideal situation is a catchment where all the water users appreciate the resource and realise the importance of taking care of the resource collectively. In Inkomati, we are all children of the same river.” 