



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### **The Catch in Catchment Management**

I never thought I would admit this. But it would be very bad for my health to ignore it any longer. I'm having sleepless nights over work. Even worse: my ex-work.

I write this letter as a passionate water scientist, a tired writer and a proud citizen of our beautiful country. While still at the Department of Water Affairs & Forestry (DWAF), the water-worry already started. But it was only when I moved "outside" the hierarchy and politics that I realised there are much more practical challenges in our country than in our wildest dreams.

From time to time we read/hear some familiar clichés about water: "By the year 2080 we will run out of fresh water", or "make every drop count" and even "water is precious". But somehow that goes in the one ear and out the other one... It's time to wake up. To start managing our water resources.

DWAF has committed themselves in their five-year Strategic Plan for 2006/06

– 2010/11 to have all Catchment Management Agencies (CMAs) established by the end of 2010 (the Soccer World Cup isn't everything!) A third of the 19 CMAs have been established already. Which is a good start. Put it together with the *February 2007 Guidelines for the development of Catchment Management Strategies: Towards equity, efficiency and sustainability* by DWAF and you have a very good start. But now we are challenged with the Catch.

It's this catch in catchment management that keeps me awake at night. And I have no idea who are 'we', 'they' or 'us' in this scenario. But we need to do something about this catch very urgently. Within the CMA (and the Advisory Committee, Catchment Management Committee and Water User Associations) there will be positions for people with specific expertise/knowledge/experience/enthusiasm for the proper functioning of these institutions. There will be 19 CMAs. With even more committees. And yes, even more WUAs.

I know for a fact and acknowledge that there already are people in the areas that have some of the skills needed to make this water management model work. People who have lived in a specific area all his/her life, current Irrigation Boards and WUAs and knowledgeable community members that can contribute immensely.

But somebody has to take these supporting guidelines and help give direction to these institutions. As much as DWAF would like to do that (I think), they do not have the capacity at all. However, they will probably continue to provide a supporting function where needed.

We probably could go on a "brain gain" campaign, but I reckon there is no need for that. But there is one need that we MUST address: the need to start providing these water institutions with capable, function specific water managers. An initiative that will basically ask just two questions: What skills/expertise will we need in our CMAs, WUAs? How can our tertiary institutions provide that? I'm positive that many of our universities and technikons are very close to equipping students with the relevant skills and knowledge. It just needs a bit of scrubbing here and adding there. This might be a much bigger, concerted effort than it sounds like, but surely not impossible by a long shot.

So what about practicing water managers that have almost forgotten about being a student? Luckily there are some of them around! With specifically designed short courses (and longer ones!) continuous education can equip any current water practitioners with specifically required skills to serve in these institutions or play a major supporting role. Unfortunately our potential 'pool' of water practitioners are – let's say – quite shallow (not in mindset, but in numbers). Therefore the dire need and urgent drive needed for equipping future students with the skills we



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need to make sure we give due support to our National Water Act.

What's the use of having an impressive pass-rate at a tertiary institution if we can't make an impressive impact on the outside? Talk about job creation; here we have jobs piling up with an opportunity to fill them with competent, equipped people. Are we going to catch this challenge, or will this ball just fall

on the ground and roll down the hill; into the dry riverbed?

**Marlese Nel, Cape Town**

### **Diatoms can be alien too**

Your article on diatoms being used in water quality monitoring is informative and fascinating (*Water Wheel* May/June 2007).

Unfortunately, Dr Taylor's remark about

diatoms "cannot be relocated to a new river or propagated as part of captive breeding programmes" is blatantly untrue. If it had not already been happening for millennia – before the emergence of the Bipedal Brachiating Ape – Dr Taylor's distinction between endemic and cosmopolitan (a term preferable to alien) would not make sense.

**Ben Dekker, Port St Johns**

### **Water Diary (Also see p 7)**

#### **APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGIES**

##### **SEPTEMBER 3-4**

WISA is hosting an Appropriate Technologies Conference at the BMW Pavilion Conference Centre, V&A Waterfront, Cape Town. *Enquiries: Taryn van Rooyen, Tel: (011) 463-5085; Fax: (011) 463-3265; E-mail: [conference@soafrica.com](mailto:conference@soafrica.com)*

#### **AQUACULTURE**

##### **OCTOBER 9-10**

Aquaculture Innovations is offering an aquaculture training course in Pretoria. The course is aimed at people who have an interest in the

industry, but require more information prior to investing. *Enquiries: Tel: (046) 622-3690; Fax: (046) 622-4868; E-mail: [info@aquaafrica.co.za](mailto:info@aquaafrica.co.za)*

#### **WASTEWATER REUSE**

##### **OCTOBER 9-12**

The 6<sup>th</sup> IWA specialised conference on Wastewater Reclamation and Reuse for Sustainability will be held in Antwerp, Belgium. Themes include water reuse and the water cycle, advances in water reclamation techniques, and best practice in water reclamation and reuse. *Enquiries: Dr Bart de Heyder;*

*Aquafin; Tel: +32 3 450 4078; Fax: +32 3 450 4444; E-mail: [info@wrrs2007.org](mailto:info@wrrs2007.org); Visit: [www.wrrs2007.org/](http://www.wrrs2007.org/)*

#### **BIOACCUMULATION SURVEYS**

##### **OCTOBER 15-19**

The Department of Zoology at the University of Johannesburg is offering a course on Monitoring Contaminant Levels in Freshwater Fish for Contaminant Bioaccumulation Surveys and Human Consumption at the UJ Island on the Vaal Dam. *Enquiries: Prof Annemarie Oldewage, Fax: (011) 559-2286, E-mail: [aoldewage@uj.ac.za](mailto:aoldewage@uj.ac.za)*

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