



## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SA Housing and the Rural Challenge

The article in the July/August edition of *the Water Wheel* about the SA Housing efforts refers (SA's housing efforts not enough, Upfront section).

I feel that the UN expert Mr Miloon Kothari is a little out of line in criticising the South African efforts in the housing field. I think all will accept that we can and must do a whole lot more. It is however unacceptable to damn the country with faint praise for its efforts. We have an enormous shortage of skills and administrative experience which is holding development back. It is also unacceptable not to put the South African situation in a world context.

I have just returned from a visit to London and was privileged to see the brilliant exhibition on urbanisation at the Tate Modern in the City of London. The statistics and the scale of the problems on a world-wide basis make the South African situation appear almost insignificant by comparison. The challenges facing China, India and some of the South American countries are monumental.

The developmental challenges that have to be met will stretch the abilities of most governments. The issue that no one

seems to be confronting realistically is rural development and the best means to reverse the drift to the cities. Add to this the challenges of population growth that are only spoken of in hushed tones, if at all, and the problems become more intractable but not insoluble.

We in South Africa still have a chance to meet the challenges with an even chance of success but it will require clear thinking, adapting rural social structures and mores to a more modern ethos and the intelligent investment of development funds to uplift rural agriculture and facilities. Oddly enough there are many areas where the basic water supply requirements are already in place and all it needs is expansion, education and maintenance training. It can be done but there needs to be less talk and more doing.

**Robert Blyth, Newlands**

### Clarity on 'alien' diatoms

This is in response to the letter of Ben Dekker (*Diatoms can be alien too*) in the July 2007 edition of *the Water Wheel*. Unfortunately my remark "...diatoms cannot be re-located to a new river or propagated as part of captive breeding programmes" has been

misconstrued and taken out of context.

I would like to elaborate on this comment. It should most certainly not have been taken to mean that certain diatom species cannot be invasive or "alien". In our scant experience it would appear that certain diatom species have a distribution limited to certain specific areas, this may be because of a combination of unique geological and climatic conditions. An example of this is the very distinctive diatom species *Navicula areolata*, described over 50 years ago from the slightly acidic, nutrient and electrolyte poor streams of the Magaliesburg. This diatom still lives in these streams but despite intensive investigations by authors such as B.J. Chohnoky has never been found to occur outside of its type locality.

It is well documented that when a water resource is even slightly polluted, this pollution will override geological and climatic influences and cause diatom (and other algal) communities which may be composed of many hundreds of species, to change. Tolerant diatom species (which are usually cosmopolitan) become dominant and (possibly) endemic species are lost, they cannot be simply placed into another system as their unique requirements may not be met. We often have little or no knowledge of the specific requirements of diatom species (in terms of micro and macro-nutrients) and thus they cannot easily be cultured in the laboratory.

However, my main point in making this statement was to stress that we need to conserve aquatic (as well as terrestrial) ecosystems as a WHOLE, once you have destroyed or impacted a unique stream you have irrevocably changed the species composition of the micro-flora.

**Dr Jonathan Taylor, Potchefstroom**



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