



6

The Strategic Framework for Water Services

Lessons series - issue six



"Making knowledge work for us"

OVERVIEW

PURPOSE

The Strategic Framework for Water Services sets out the national framework for the water services sector (water supply and sanitation). The Strategic Framework will inform the development of detailed strategies to give effect to the framework. The purpose of the Strategic Framework is to put forward a vision for the water services sector in South Africa for the next ten years and to set out the framework that will enable the sector vision to be achieved.

- Strategic Framework for Water Services, p3

Key changes compared to the 1994 White Paper:

- 1) This Strategic Framework is a comprehensive framework paper for the water services sector.
- 2) DWAF will become a sector leader, supporter and regulator (rather than an operator).
- 3) Water Services Authorities are responsible for the delivery of water services.
- 4) An approach to the institutional reform of water services provision is set out.
- 5) The financial policy framework reflects the consolidation of national government funding to local government through the equitable share, the municipal infrastructure grant and the capacity building grant.
- 6) More emphasis is placed on sustainability, financial viability and efficiency.
- 7) The vision of the water ladder is clearly defined in order to ensure commitment of the sector to enable all people to progressively move up the ladder to higher levels of service.

- Strategic Framework, p3

Lead institutions involved in drawing up the Strategic Framework

- ◉ Department of Water Affairs and Forestry
- ◉ South African Local Government Association
- ◉ South African Association of Water Utilities
- ◉ Department of Provincial and Local Government
- ◉ National Treasury



DEPARTMENT: WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY
DEPARTMENT: PROVINCIAL AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT
NATIONAL TREASURY



Sector vision: Water is life, sanitation is dignity

All people living in South Africa have access to adequate, safe, appropriate and affordable water and sanitation services, use water wisely and practise safe sanitation.

Water supply and sanitation services are provided by effective, efficient and sustainable institutions that are accountable and responsive to those whom they serve. Water services institutions reflect the cultural, gender and racial diversity in South Africa.

Water is used effectively, efficiently and sustainably in order to reduce poverty, improve human health and promote economic development. Water and wastewater are managed in an environmentally responsible and sustainable manner.

- Strategic Framework, p5

A lesson in collaborative policy development

The policy review process that produced the Strategic Framework for Water Services was the product of a groundbreaking collaboration within the South African water services sector. The success of this collaborative approach holds lessons for policy formulation within the water services sector and beyond.

Among the many challenges that faced the new democratic South African state in 1994 was the pressing need to bring clean water and sanitation to the millions of South African households marginalised by the skewed development policies of the apartheid state.

Guided by the Water Supply and Sanitation Policy White Paper (1994), the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) embarked on a vigorous delivery campaign to address these backlogs. Given the chaotic inheritance of apartheid-era institutions, it would take several years before local government would be capable of fulfilling its constitutional mandate to deliver water services.

In the years following 1994, DWAF established itself as the primary delivery agency for water services in rural areas, establishing water committees, building schemes and channeling funding to expand water services infrastructure.

By 1997 and 1998, however, significant developments had taken place within the local government environment, clearing the way for the decentralisation of water services to the local government level.

Legislation such as the Water Services Act (1997), the Municipal Structures Act (1998) and the Municipal Systems Act (2000) gave life to the constitutional prescription that local government deliver water services, by establishing Water Services Authorities at the municipal level.

The local government elections of 2000 were a definitive milestone in this process of transformation, creating the new structures responsible for the delivery of water services.

In line with this process of decentralisation, the Division of Revenue Act (promulgated annually) progressively directed both operating and capital funds for water services to local government. This marked a profound shift for DWAF, having been the primary funding channel for water services in the rural areas.

Further changes to the policy environment, such as the Free Basic Water Policy in 2000 and the introduction of integrated water resources management, also had major implications for the water services sector.

By 2001 there was a clear need for a policy framework to consolidate the legislative and institutional developments that had taken place within the water services sector.

At the start of 2002 DWAF therefore embarked on a process aimed at developing a new White Paper for water services to guide the sector.

Communal standpipes in Cato Crest, Kwazulu Natal



A policy review

The then Directorate of Intervention and Operations Support, under the leadership of Helgard Muller, was tasked with the responsibility of developing the new White Paper. Muller assigned two staff members - Abri Vermeulen and Thuli Khambule - to drive the process. Vermeulen was the project leader, with Khambule working as the coordinator.

"Because this was the policy [that would guide the sector] for the next ten years, it was important to get it right," says Muller.

Muller's decision to release Vermeulen and Khambule from virtually all other commitments for the eighteen months that the process required, together with the financial resources that were allocated to the process, were key factors contributing to the levels of success and buy-in that the process eventually achieved.

"We dedicated about 80 percent of our time for eighteen months. It was a huge commitment and without that it would not have happened," says Vermeulen.

Working with a team of consultants, an "Issues and Options" document was drawn up and the team embarked on what Vermeulen describes as the "standard process of consultation".

The initial challenge was to identify the key people that needed to be consulted.

"We sat down internally as DWAF and decided who we wanted to speak to; who would need a bilateral, who would need a workshop and so on. People would react differently to the same document, depending on how you structured the meeting, whether you go to them or they come to you and who else was present," says Khambule.

Martin Rall, Executive Director of the Mvula Trust, South Africa's largest non-governmental organisation involved in rural water services, echoes others in the sector when he says that the consultative process did not initially go

far enough to get buy-in from the emerging local government sector.

"The process started off as pretty much the classic DWAF policy development process, similar to the 1994 Water and Sanitation Policy White Paper, similar to the White Paper on [Basic Household] Sanitation, similar to the water law process etcetera. Those processes took place at a time when local government wasn't really organised and active in the water services sector and the results speak for themselves.

"The Water and Sanitation Policy White Paper, in terms of what it had to say about demand responsiveness and appropriate technology, to all intents and purposes didn't exist for local government and still doesn't exist. Initially it [the Strategic Framework] looked like was going to be one of those processes that only peripherally involved local government and would then probably be challenged by local government later," says Rall.

By December 2002 the process had seen two rounds of consultation taking place on two drafts of the White Paper. The original timeframe of six months had proven unrealistic. Vermeulen describes the consultation process on the draft White Paper as being far more rigorous than most policy processes.

It was in December 2002, after almost 12 months of work that the second draft was presented to the Water Services Sector Leadership Group (WSSLG).

"Whilst I wouldn't say there was an uproar, there was a certain disquiet that it was very much a DWAF thing, as opposed to a sector thing," says Charles Reeve, project officer for water and sanitation with the European Union's donor programme for South Africa.

At this meeting it was decided that the White Paper should be finalised through a collaborative process.

"To the total credit of DWAF, they took that on board and said let's create a sub-committee of the sector leadership group which will take this process forward," says Reeve.

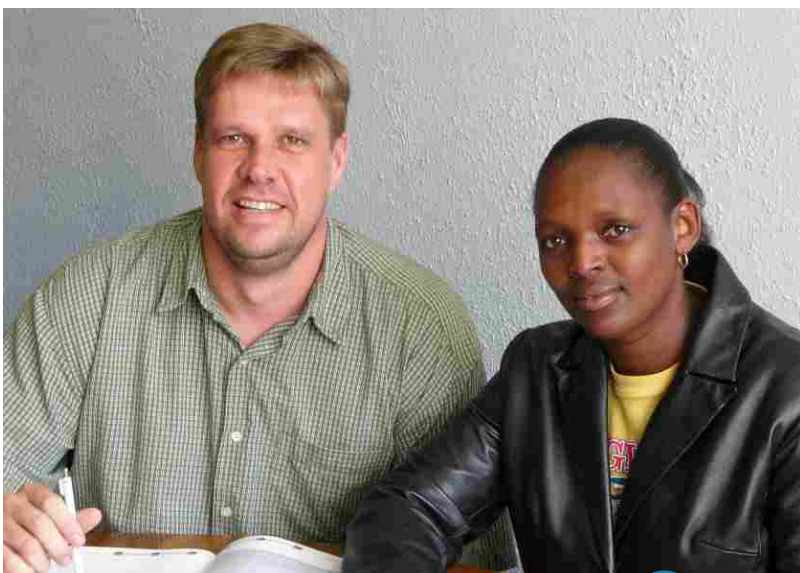
It was this sub-committee, which came to be known as the core group, which was to transform the policy initiative from a consultative one to a collaborative one.

Sector Leadership

The WSSLG was formed in 2002 out of a need for a sector-wide forum to provide leadership on policy issues.

It is a forum where national departments involved in water services, namely DWAF, the Department of Provincial and Local Government and the National Treasury as well as others like Health, Education and Housing come together with local government, in the form of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), civil society, the labour unions and the South

Abri Vermeulen and Thuli Khambule



African Association of Water Utilities (SAAWU) to debate policy and strategy on water services.

“It (the WSSLG) was very much a vehicle of change in terms of paradigm shifting and releasing the power relations. It was about finding the kind of mechanisms which allowed leadership from within the sector to build a common vision, take a common path and ensure some accountability,” says Louise Colvin, a key Masibambane facilitator.

Masibambane, meaning “Let’s work together”, is the sector support programme for the water services sector.

Colvin says that the issue around the role of local government had been looming large since 1997/98.

“Tensions had arisen around the fact that you can’t drive a programme for sustainable service delivery from the national level and that you have to address the issue of local government. If you look at the first white paper it didn’t even mention local government,” she says.

It was clear that the role DWAF was playing as an implementer of community-based water services was at odds with the institutional arrangements necessary for sustainable services. The tensions that had developed between DWAF and local government over this would have to be resolved.

“There was a growing awareness that the writing was on the wall in terms of decentralisation. The legislation was showing the way and it was vitally important to put that in practice. Legislation was on the side of this collaborative approach, so the reality was that DWAF had to make it work,” says Colvin.

Colvin argues that the consultative process that DWAF

was following was fundamentally different to the collaborative process to developing policy being called for by the WSSLG.

“Essentially, you’re very disempowered when you come to meetings and you have this wonderful power-point presentation and you make a few comments and you go away again. Fundamentally, a consultative process is different from collaboratively developing policy. And that’s where the turning point was. The sector players had more of a voice and they were able to say no this is not the way you do things,” she says.

Rall says that because of the ambitious timeframes set for the White Paper’s completion, the process initially looked like it would not engage substantively with the concerns of local government.

“Fortunately, what happened was that the Masibambane programme funded SALGA to have a water services person, Bev Pretorius, to deal with water services issues. She played the role that was missing in SALGA and local government in previous processes, informing them more effectively about the implications of what was being proposed.”

“Basically, on behalf of SALGA, she put her foot down, and said ‘if you are going to carry on like this and not allow SALGA to consult properly through its structures, then we want no part in this process and we are not going to endorse this’. So the consultation process had to take a different route, had to be more in-depth and genuine as far as local government was concerned,” says Rall.

Rolfe Eberhardt, chief drafter on the team of consultants, echoes Rall.

“There was a challenge from Bev Pretorius who said, ‘is

Testing raw water at Rietvlei Water Treatment Works





this a DWAF document or is this a sector document? If it's a sector policy then we've got to engage with it much more substantially.' DWAF said that they wanted as much sector buy-in as possible, so they agreed to sit down in a series of working sessions with key sector stakeholders."

Core Group

The decision was made to set up a core group, effectively a sub-group of the WSSLG, which would provide the vehicle for this collaborative approach to drafting the policy document.

Vermeulen explains that the core group was a way of getting knowledgeable people together to debate issues and come to agreements. It was not, as some people have incorrectly understood it, a steering or management committee.

He says people's participation varied from session to session, depending on the subjects to be debated.

"We would have one or two-day sessions where we would tackle a particular chapter. For each session, stakeholders ensured that they sent their experts on that issue, topic or chapter. In this way, the Strategic Framework was agreed to by the partners," Vermeulen says.

"We had extensive debates, and we made a lot of changes. The groups were small enough for us to have really in-depth debates, because when the group is too big, you get can get side tracked, especially when there are people who are not totally up to speed with the issue.

"So we made sure, for the chapter under discussion, we chose the right people to be there, so we could get into the details and thrash them out. On average, the core group meetings were attended by between 10 and 15 people, and we were there for the whole day discussing a certain issue. If we didn't finish we'd schedule another meeting," he adds.

Colvin agrees: "You take bite-sized pieces and do justice to them. I think it was a very powerful process. You got the best debate that I've seen, you got the best kind of a buy-in, and you relied on the partners to feed back into their constituencies and come back with a mandate and a

coherent position. Beyond representation, we were bringing in expertise."

She argues that it was crucial that the core group was made up of key players who came with proper mandates on the positions they were arguing for.

"It was absolutely crucial for them to go back into their decision-making structures and to get the authority for certain positions. [Through this process] SALGA really began to get to the issues on the ground that I think DWAF was unaware of," says Colvin.

Bev Pretorius, SALGA's representative for water services at the time, says that the opportunity to obtain mandates from one's constituency and prepare for discussions on particular issues strengthened the process considerably.

"It was a very robust process. We would discuss the issues with the municipalities and then go back to the core group and report back on what municipalities were saying. We took regular opinions from the SALGA politicians," she says.

"The great thing was that we had a budget from Masibambane for the SALGA water services unit, so we could take care of the logistics, in terms of travel and so on. This meant that the SALGA representatives could focus all their attention on the quality of their inputs and could stay involved for the entire process. So you got a richness of input that you often don't get, particularly from the smaller municipalities," she adds.

Neil McLeod, head of eThekweni municipality's water and sanitation department, who was part of the SALGA technical group, says the effort put into establishing and maintaining the SALGA group was an important success factor.

"I think preparation was vital. Bev set up that technical group within SALGA in such a way that we had people, not just from the metros, but from the big municipalities, the middle-sized ones and the little ones. So we were exploring what the issues meant for both the big guys and the little guys. SALGA got its act together for the first time. That was a very important thing," says McLeod.

McLeod also argues that it took a change in mindset from DWAF in order for the process to follow the collaborative route that it did.

"Some thorny issues got sorted out through a process of debate. I think everyone put their cards on the table and said 'Okay, we see each other's points'. We had to compromise as SALGA, and DWAF had to compromise as DWAF," adds McLeod.

Vermeulen underscores the effort that was made to ensure that the process captured the concerns of all stakeholders, particularly the often-marginalised rural voice.

"We, as a group, made a big effort to get the total voice, a balanced view, in the document. This meant dedicating a

Bev Pretorius





Municipal standpipe in Ukahlamba District Municipality, Eastern Cape

lot of resources to bringing people from the rural municipalities, because someone from a big metro can pay for their own flights, but someone from a small district cannot. So we worked hard to make sure that we got the people that could bring that voice," says Vermeulen.

"What was important about the core group was that stakeholders heard what other stakeholders were saying. They did not hear it from DWAF. SAAWU heard what SALGA themselves were saying about rural areas," he adds.

Thabo Mayosi, at the time a water services manager for O.R. Tambo District Municipality in the Eastern Cape, brought a rural perspective to the SALGA technical team.

"In most of the issues and targets I kept the panel aware that some of the things were not possible in the rural areas. We were creating a uniform framework for the whole country, be it central Sandton or deep rural Bizana. So things were rephrased after long discussions to suit rural conditions as well.

"Our concerns were incorporated into the framework," says Mayosi.

The benefits

Though originally conceived as a White Paper, when the

document was finally presented to Cabinet it was decided that it should be called the Strategic Framework for Water Services, as it was a consolidation of policy and a framework for the implementation of legislation.

The document, and the agreements contained in it, were the tangible expression of a major breakthrough towards the creation of a unified and organised water services sector.

"It was important that there was a willingness from us, as the department, to listen to the sector, to realise that you can't do it alone. It is a sector policy, that is the way we would like to see it, its not a DWAF policy, because any policy needs to be implemented by the sector and the better you incorporate and involve everyone, the less marketing that is needed at the end," says Helgard Muller.

John Connolly, chief executive of SAAWU, which represents water boards as well as other water services providers, says that the process went a long way to creating a more unified sector.

"There were differing views, but we had to ask 'how do we as a sector align our thinking in terms of developing policy that would get services to people?' We were able to clear up, or let's say more closely align, certain views," says Connolly.

He argues that it paid to spend the time getting the key role-players more cohesive and aligned during the policy process, as this would make the implementation phase much easier.

"If you just arbitrarily, by decree, set out new policy and try to implement, you will spend your life fighting with the various role-players trying to explain why it's necessary," he adds.

Pretorius agrees: "The test comes at the implementation stage. I think that the reason the Strategic Framework is so well accepted and supported is because we had such a huge level of buy-in. As SALGA we were a full and equal

Thabo Mayosi





partner in this process, we weren't just responding to what DWAF had written, we ourselves were telling them what should be written."

Rall feels that the process resulted in the endorsement, by SALGA, of progressive positions on the role of civil society.

"We made quite a lot of input around the issue of civil society participation, the role of CBO's (community-based organisations) in managing services, the role of civil society in bottom-up regulation and holding service providers and authorities to account. That was our main area of emphasis.

"We were quite surprised at how much got through. Certainly at national level and certainly publicly, local government says all the right things, so there was quite a big chunk on civil society that we managed to get approved. What actually happens on the ground in most municipalities, the view of civil society is quite hostile, skeptical, but they certainly approved something quite progressive.

"We also had a lot of positive stuff about sustainability, about the importance of O&M and all those quite ambitious targets. It was a conscious decision by the team and the DWAF officials to say there's no harm in trying to get it approved. Let's put in some targets. Let's give the sector a vision of where it wants to go. And all those 19 targets are there in the front [of the Strategic Framework]," adds Rall.

Vermeulen says that although there were many issues that could not be resolved, the approach to resolving them was defined through the Strategic Framework process

"We said 'what we can agree on, we'll put that in the strategic framework. What we can't agree on, we'll deal with later.' What we did was to define the approach and principles to tackling these outstanding issues and currently we are addressing issues such as the regulatory strategy and the institutional reform strategy through this sector collaborative approach," he says.

Worth the effort

The process of drafting and finalising the Strategic Framework, which was finally published in September 2003, had taken more than 18 months, a year longer than the original timeframe of six months. But all the stakeholders agree that the time, cost and effort was worth it.

"If you look at the calibre of people that attended and what they cost their institutions, it is a significant cost. But the benefits were more," says Vermeulen.

"There was a cost to all the institutions involved. We all carried costs in the process and for all of us, the time and cost was worth it," adds Pretorius.

Rall agrees: "You always underestimate the amount of time that it takes, and if it's done properly, it's generally worth the extra investment and time. You get a better product at the end of the day. Not in terms of the document per se, but the buy-in and the impact that the document has on the sector. I think it has had more impact than previous White Papers and other documents."

"The Strategic Framework was a major achievement. Critical decisions were made and the process allowed all



eThekweni municipal yard tank

the sector role-players to engage with vital sector issues and come to agreements that they were truly party to," says Pretorius.

"What we would like our colleagues to recognise is that getting a sector policy document on the table is a massive effort, but it pays massive dividends," she adds.

Barbara Schreiner, DWAF Deputy Director General, describes the Strategic Framework as the governing document for the sector, carrying the same weight as a White Paper would.

The process of developing the document had brought the sector together, and although the process was time-consuming and costly, "it was way cheaper than a policy that has no buy-in at the end of the day," says Schreiner.

TARGETS CONTAINED IN THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

ACCESS TO SERVICES

1. All people in South Africa have access to a functioning basic water supply facility by 2008.
2. All people in South Africa have access to a functioning basic sanitation facility by 2010.
3. All schools have adequate and safe water supply and sanitation services by 2005.
4. All clinics have adequate and safe water supply and sanitation services by 2007.
5. All bucket toilets are eradicated by 2006.
6. Investment in water services infrastructure in the sector totals at least 0.75% of GDP.

EDUCATION AND HEALTH

7. Hygiene education and the wise use of water are taught in all schools by 2005.
8. 70% of households with access to at least a basic sanitation facility know-how to practise safe sanitation by 2005 (and 100% by 2010).

FREE BASIC SERVICES

9. Free basic water policy implemented in all water services authorities by 2005.
10. Free basic sanitation policy implemented in all water services authorities by 2010.

INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE

11. A national institutional reform strategy is developed by June 2004.
12. The institutional reform of regional water services providers is completed by 2013.
13. All assets of water services schemes are transferred from DWAF to water services authorities by 2008.
14. By-laws are promulgated in every water services authority area by 2005.
15. All water services authorities report annually on progress against their water services development plans by 2005.
16. All external water services providers are rendering services in terms of a contract with the applicable water services authority by 2005.
17. All water services providers are rendering services in terms of a business plan by 2005.
18. All water services authorities have adopted a set of key performance indicators that include those set out in Annexure 2 by 2005 and report on these annually.
19. DWAF reports on sector development and progress annually.



LOOKING AT THE LESSONS

1 Effective policy needs the buy-in of all stakeholders

Policy, however well considered, will struggle to realise its objectives in a democratic environment if the institutions responsible for its implementation have not been involved in its formulation. The Strategic Framework process achieved a high level of buy-in through:

- o A core group approach, which involved senior mandated representatives from all sector stakeholders
- o A willingness of the lead department, DWAF, to embark on a collaborative approach to this policy process
- o A focused chapter-by-chapter approach, allowing all stakeholders to consult their constituencies and in bring their experts to tackle particular aspects of the policy

“We got buy-in from all sector partners. [The Strategic Framework] gets down to the real issues in terms of implementing legislation. I think we moved away from a fuzzy high-level policy document to talk about the practical issues.” Helgard Muller, Chief Director, Water Services

“If we, as a sector, agree to something, the value is much greater than what we would have got on our own. The real success is not having the document; the success is getting a common understanding and agreement around the issues. What encourages me the most is that wherever I go, people will talk about the Strategic Framework and refer to it, not as a DWAF document, but as a sector document. Everybody feels it is their document, and everybody owns it.” Abri Vermeulen, Director Water Services Policy and Strategy, DWAF

“The lesson to me is getting the involvement of all the stakeholders on an equal footing, to make their inputs. If you want them to buy into a strategy, you have to involve them in its development.” Dr Charles Reeve, project officer for water and sanitation with the European Union’s donor programme for South Africa

2 Collaborative policy development requires investment and commitment

The success of the Strategic Framework process depended on a high level of commitment from the institutions and individuals involved. This required:

- o Strong and motivated champions of the process within the key stakeholder groups to drive the consulting and mandating process within their constituencies
- o High level political and bureaucratic commitment to the process from the lead department
- o Sufficient resources to ensure proper participation from all stakeholders and to secure top drafting and support services

“The success of the process was a product of dedicated people from all stakeholder groups. It required funding to get people there, and also to secure consultant support. Some people think that if you just get consultants, you will get the job done. It takes more than that to get a meaningful output.” Bev Pretorius, former Director Water Services, SALGA

“If you are going to start a consultative process like that, you’ve got to follow it through. In other words, you can’t say we’re going to be consultative here, but in all these other areas we are going to make all the decisions. From a national departmental perspective, I think there was some kind of learning that once you engage in that kind of process you are in it boots-and-all. You can’t get out of it too easily thereafter. That needs to be appreciated.” John Connolly, Chief Executive Officer, SAAWU

“It definitely takes serious commitment, but it also takes serious resources. Both of those together will ensure success, not either one or the other.” Abri Vermeulen

“We were lucky because there were people who were knowledgeable and wanted to engage. If you don’t have that you can’t conjure it up. People gave their time, they read the draft, they said we don’t agree with this paragraph here because of this and this, or this paragraph must be in there because it supports that.” Rolfe Eberhardt, chief drafter, Palmer Development Group

3 The value lies in the process

The debates, discussions and deliberations that made up the collaborative policy process contributed to deepening the sector's understanding of itself and the concerns of the various sector partners. This has had many benefits:

- o Sector stakeholders have a commitment to the targets contained in the Strategic Framework
- o All stakeholders have an understanding of common purpose, as expressed by the Strategic Framework
- o The policy process laid the foundation for the implementation of the policy

"If the process had not existed, you would have not got something that was considered to be a sector strategy. It would have been considered to be a DWAF strategy and you wouldn't have the unifying effect that I think it's had. So I wouldn't go as far as to say that the process was more important than the outcome, but without the process, the outcome would not have been a commonly accepted strategy." Charles Reeve

"I think that the Strategic Framework has taken the water services sector's commitment to sector collaboration into the policy realm. For me, it's the first policy that was collaboratively developed among the sector parties. I think we laid down the golden path of how we should prepare policy." Bev Pretorius

"Obviously the output is important because it is the framework that guides us into the future. But in terms of the learning, the learning came out of the process that was followed and the engagement of the role-players and the improved understanding and appreciation for other people's views and perspectives of the world." John Connolly

Water harvesting in rural Eastern Cape



WIN-SA lessons series

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To download a copy of the Strategic Framework for Water Services, please go to www.win-sa.org.za/sfws

WIN-SA mission

Our mission is to ensure the body of knowledge in the sector is well managed, readily accessible and applied, leading to improved decision-making and performance, especially of local government.



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