

The trouble with water

By Ian Cox



I wrote an article for the August 2012 Bobbin entitled Water (click [here](#) for that article) that warned of the problems we are currently experiencing and in particular the fact that it is not just the shortage of water which is the problem but what we and in particular municipal water works are doing to it.

A report appeared in the Afrikaans press earlier this month of a massive sewerage spill which had accumulated at the Vaal barrage killing thousands of fish (Click here for the article). South African Fly fishing Champion, Daniel Factor, who is our guest tyer for the next meeting, fished the barrage a couple of weeks later. He and his fishing buddy went down with diarrhea as a result.

There was a similar report of a massive spill on the Bushmans a few months back.

The fact of the matter is that such spills are the norm rather than the exception, especially when they are power outages. This is because very few sewerage treatment plants have backup generators which means when the power goes the treatment plants stop working leaving raw sewerage to flow back into the system. This is over and above the fact that a lot of sewerage is not treated at all. In fact one politician told me that South Africa does not have the resources to treat the sewerage it generates.

Dr Turton has been warning about this for some time as have the Freedom Front of all people. The former's interest is scientific, the latter political. Much of the Freedom Front support base comes from poor white communities living in rural areas. Rural communities are particularly vulnerable when the water supply begins to break down or degrade as recent events have shown.

Research done by Dr Turton and the Freedom Front shows that government is the major cause of water pollution. This accuracy of this research has not been contested. About 50% of all water pollution is caused by the State's failure to properly manage sewerage and sewerage

farms in particular. This is not just a case of a lack of capacity or resources. Corruption is a major cause of these breakdowns. There have been cases where honest hard working officials who work with communities to sort out the treatment of sewerage have been replaced with corrupt officials whose are happy to steal even at the cost of human lives.

People are dying because the water situation is not being addressed. Many more will die as the lack of water causes concentrations harmful sometimes deadly bacteria to increase.

Yet government continues to do very little. Water Affairs has still not worked out how to calculate the ecological reserve of rivers nearly 20 years after it built a law whose operation is dependent on government being able to work out that ecological reserve and police it. The result is that rivers are now running dry. The consequence for aquatic biodiversity and fishing is dire as Ed Herbst recently pointed out in an article he wrote for the CPS newsletter entitled "Trout and the Farmer"

The Department of Environmental Affairs is just as supine. Its focus is on trying to eradicate trout is one example of its manic pursuit of a grandiose and impractical scheme built on notions of species purity and the belief that any species introduced by man does not belong.

Thus every local authority must deploy resources they do not have to map the whereabouts (at the level of individual properties) of 559 so called invasive species and then devise and implement schemes to eradicate or control those species. But we lack the resources to do something as basic as manage our own shit!

The truth is that environmental laws are not improving the health and wellbeing of South Africans. Much of the environmental laws finding their way onto the statute books do more to build an oppressive regime that favours the rich and makes criminals of everyone else than advance human health and wellbeing.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, that we are increasingly threatened with an environment that is harmful to our health and wellbeing. This is a threat which is as least as big as the current economic meltdown. It is why the work trout fishers are doing to defend the trout value chain and the work done by of trout fishers like Andrew Folwer and the Natal Fly Fishers Club and Dr Leonard Flemming and The Cape Piscatorial Society is so important.

In the meantime if we sit back and do nothing, rivers will continue get dirtier, human health and wellbeing will increasingly be compromised as will human rights. People will be killed in increasingly large numbers.
