

Farmers concerned over excessive water wastage

Farmers in the Free State are gravely concerned about the effect of the wastage of water by authorities on agricultural activities, food production and in the end food security.



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Free State Agriculture's (FSAgri) Committee on Water and Irrigation says, according to a report by the Department of Water Affairs, 230 million cubic meters of water was wasted during May 2015 in the Orange River System. According to the July 2015 Monthly Monitoring Report from the *Orange River System: Annual Operation Analysis 2015 - 2016*, the wastage took place over 10 days out of the Vanderkloofdam, after too much water was released out of the Gariep Dam earlier.

Power crisis effecting water resources

According to the department the situation is unacceptable. The storage levels of the dams are also below the total expected storage levels of the combined system, which is cause for grave concern. One of the reasons for the amounts of water released, is hydropower generation due to the country's power crisis.

Dr. Jack Armour, operational manager at FSAgri, says the country's power crisis can - if the situation continues as is - also impact food security if strict water restrictions are imposed on farmers and they cannot deliver the harvests expected or hoped for. Restrictions are usually first imposed on farmers when water shortages arise.

Roelf Jacobs, representative for the committee as well as a farmer from Wepener, says the organisation will deal decisively with the wastage of water. "During a dry year, like the 2014-2015 season, where food security is endangered with a below average harvest, it is unacceptable to know that water is wasted by the department tasked with the responsibility to manage the water balance in South Africa." He says the department will be called to account for the situation.

According to Jacobs about 23,000 ha could have been irrigated with the water wasted, which could have delivered 322,000 tons of maize, worth R966 million.

An excerpt from the report:

The Orange River Project (Gariep and Vanderkloof dams) is performing worse than expected with the observed storage levels below the lowest projected storage levels for the combined system, which is of high concern. The main reasons for this is the higher than target abstractions that took place as well as too high releases from both Gariep and Vanderkloof dams for emergency hydro-power generation purposes.

Due to too high releases from Gariep Dam, Vanderkloof Dam spilled for 10 days in May, which is unacceptable. By the end of July approximately 230 million m³/a in excess of the target volume was released from Vanderkloof Dam. The Orange Riet Canal, Orange Fish tunnel transfers as well as Orange Vaal transfer from Marksdrift Weir, all exceeded their target transfer volumes.

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