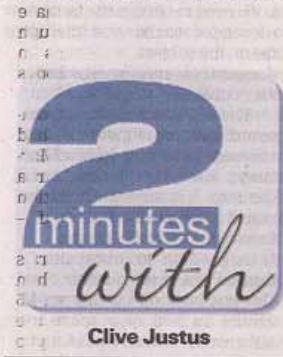


# Working to keep our water clean

Millions of rands budgeted to keep city water supply clean



The Cape Times recently reported that scientists had found increasing *E. coli* and faecal coliform counts in 14 rivers and 10 wetlands in the metropole and that the standard of water for recreational purposes had declined by almost half in the past eight years. Clive Justus, the mayoral committee member for utility services, addresses the issue.

**What does your position entail?**

I have authority with regard to the services of water, sanitation, solid waste and electricity.

**What is the most enjoyable part of your job?**

The challenges that all those services present. They are the bread and butter issues of the citizens of Cape Town.

**If the water doesn't flow then there's a crisis. If the electricity doesn't function then it's a crisis. Sanitation is a prerequisite for healthy sustainable life, and obviously we need to manage the situation in such a way that it doesn't impact negatively on life.**

**With the quality of water in rivers dropping, how often is water quality checked?**

It's checked on a monthly basis and it's been ongoing for years. We're judging the water quality over a 10-year period and we've seen a steady decline over that.

**Are solutions being looked at within the informal settlements?**

Solutions to all the issues are being considered. We know, for example, that the conditions of the rivers are influenced by stormwater run-off - things in the stormwater canals could be trash, tins, paper, leaves, diesel, oil or petrol.

In Woodstock the other day, we had a diesel spill which invariably makes its way into the stormwater canals and down to the nearest water body.

It would include things like overflow from sewerage works, or the malfunctioning of a pump station in the sewerage works.

Then you have human interaction, people going down to the water to wash themselves and their clothing - they empty the container in which they've done the dishes. So these things all have an impact on the river quality and the consultants have provided us



**UPGRADE:** Sewage from Canal Pump station flows into Little Princess Vlei, killing fish, in this 2007 photograph. The City of Cape Town has a R280 million budget to upgrade wastewater treatment plants. Princess Vlei is receiving a R3m intervention for the removal of alien vegetation and to make the vlei more accessible for recreation.

with the way forward, which would include things like sand traps.

The stormwater would move through a sand trap to take out all the large particulates in the water body. We're looking at chlorination of the water, both from sewerage works and from stormwater.

We're looking at using ultraviolet light to kill off bacteria and micro-organisms that could be hazardous in the water before it gets into the river, before it gets into the vleis and the sea - we want to pre-treat it. Now these are all to be considered by the city and we will be rolling them out in areas where we have particular problems.

**You have a R280 million budget to upgrade/renew waste water treatment plants. How long will it take?**

We've got a 10-year plan. We have budgeted for the first three years - a value for this financial year of R280m, next year R250m and the year thereafter a similar amount.

There are planned interventions of both new plant capacity, upgrading existing capacity and then improvement of the existing technology as well.

That will include things like pump station upgrades so that we don't have unnecessary outflows that are not properly treated, or rather do not comply with the standards set by the Department of



**CHALLENGES:** Clive Justus

Picture: MXOLISI MADELA

Water Affairs. That should significantly improve the quality of water that is released from the waste water treatment plant.

It is very important to acknowledge that no untreated or raw sewage goes into any of the water bodies.

It is treated effluent that has not

reached an adequate standard before it goes in, but the system works in that it gets treated, it goes into maturation ponds, it stays there for up to six days before the treated effluent goes into a water body.

So even if we have major inflows of water such as rain, the time period is more than adequate in the maturation ponds before it goes into any natural system.

Princess Vlei is receiving a R3m intervention which will be looking at the removal of alien vegetation and making it a lot more accessible to recreation and therefore it's incumbent to make certain that the water quality is of an acceptable standard. That intervention is in place.

**Do you drink water out of the tap in Cape Town?**

Absolutely. There is no doubt in my mind that the quality of water in Cape Town is excellent. Cape Town has the highest-quality potable water in South Africa.

**You've advised that people have as little contact with river water as possible. How much contact can make you ill?**

We're only talking about the rivers and the vleis, not potable water or water that comes from the catchment areas such as the mountains and into our potable water reticulation.

I would say that one shouldn't

unnecessarily expose yourself to the rivers and vleis.

Don't swim in them, definitely don't drink the water, and if there are open wounds, don't expose them to the water.

These rivers should not be used for recreational purposes at all. I got an enquiry from the Western Province Freshwater Angling Society which uses Zeekoevlei and Princess Vlei, and my advice was to engage with the department where they take the sampling in those vleis as to the adequacy of health, because it is evident that in some parts of the vlei the conditions are worse than in others, particularly where stormwater runs off into those vleis.

Be careful, pay attention to warning signs. Don't go into rivers or use vleis where there are signs. Where there aren't warning signs, conditions are probably better.

**Who can people contact to check on the safety of water bodies?**

They can call Barry Wood from the Transport, Roads and Stormwater section.

They are responsible for monitoring the water conditions and he would be in the best position to allay any fears or offer guidance as to which water bodies could be used.

His number is 021 487 2205.

● Interview by Lesley Byram