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Media Statement

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City establishes task teams to reduce waste and sewer spillages in river systems

The City of Johannesburg's Environment and Infrastructure Services Department (EISD), through its Water Quality and Catchment Management Unit, is implementing a series of targeted interventions to clean, rehabilitate, and protect rivers and catchments across the city.

This update was presented during the State of the Rivers in the City workshop on 18 May 2026 at the Brixton Multipurpose Centre. The workshop, convened by EISD, aimed to brief the Section 79 Committee on Environment and Infrastructure Services on the status of Johannesburg's River systems and ongoing interventions.

The session was attended by the Chairperson of the Section 79 Committee, Cllr Charmaine Ngoepe; the Member of the Mayoral Committee for EISD, Cllr Jack Sekwaila; Executive Director of EISD Dr Tebogo Modiba; members of the Section 79 Committee; and senior officials from various City entities and departments, including Johannesburg Water, Johannesburg City Parks and Zoo, Human Settlements, and Pikitup.

At the core of the City's response is the establishment of Water Quality Task Teams across all Water Management Units. These task teams are designed to strengthen coordination among municipal entities, departments, and external stakeholders whose operations impact water quality. They serve as platforms for integrated planning, joint compliance monitoring, and the implementation of targeted, catchment-specific interventions.

The task teams were established in response to growing concerns over the deterioration of water quality in Johannesburg's rivers, spruits, dams, and wetlands. Persistent challenges such as recurring sewer spillages, industrial effluent discharge, and polluted stormwater runoff have underscored the need for a coordinated and accountable approach.

The City is divided into 19 Water Management Units, which are hydrologically defined sub-catchments that enable localised and effective water resource management. Ten WMUs fall within the Klip River Catchment, while nine fall within the Jukskei River Catchment. These units are supported by ongoing monthly water quality monitoring programmes focusing on microbiological and chemical indicators.

Addressing the attendees, Dr Modiba emphasised the need for improved coordination within the City: “We need to work as one City. A coordinated response is required to effectively address these challenges. This platform allows us to brief councillors on planned interventions, as they are often the first point of contact for residents.”

Several priority interventions are already underway in high-risk areas within the Jukskei River Catchment:

- **Bruma Water Management Unit:** This area faces challenges linked to ageing infrastructure, illegal stormwater connections, and upstream pressures from surrounding suburbs. Interventions include the replacement of a collapsed 400mm sewer pipe on Kensington Street, with construction currently underway. In Bezuidenhout Valley, a collapsed 600mm pipe has been temporarily diverted, while procurement processes for a permanent replacement are ongoing.
- **Kaalspruit Water Management Unit:** This transboundary catchment, which spans parts of Johannesburg, Ekurhuleni, and Tshwane, is undergoing infrastructure improvements. Short-term interventions include refurbishment of electro-mechanical equipment and enhanced security. Long-term plans involve upgrading pump station infrastructure, installing stormwater retention systems, and providing permanent backup power and security facilities.
- **Diepsloot Water Management Unit:** Located within a rapidly developing urban corridor, this WMU includes a mix of informal settlements and formal residential areas. Recent interventions include the repair of a sewer line damaged by flooding in Bloubosrand, as well as ongoing construction to fix a collapsed sewer line in Craigavon.

“The health of Johannesburg’s rivers is directly linked to the well-being, environmental sustainability, and future resilience of our city. This workshop provides an important platform to strengthen coordination and advance practical solutions to restore and protect our water resources for current and future generations” says Daniel Masemola, Director of Water Management and Biodiversity for the City of Joburg.

During the engagement, councillors raised concerns about recurring issues and called for more proactive, long-term solutions rather than reactive responses to service failures.

In response, the City reaffirmed its commitment to prioritising pollution hotspot WMUs, where sewer spillages, industrial discharge, stormwater contamination, and waste accumulation continue to degrade river health.

The City of Johannesburg will continue to intensify the implementation of these interventions, with a focus on addressing the root causes of pollution and restoring the ecological integrity of watercourses across the municipality.

Ends

Issued by the City of Johannesburg

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