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## MISLEADING MEDIA REPORTS ON VAAL RIVER POLLUTION

SAVE has received numerous calls expressing disbelief at recent articles referring to a 'pollution-free Vaal River'. These articles are misleading and SAVE has communicated with the editors requesting them to correct the misperceptions that have been created.

The Vaal River is far from clean between Vereeniging and the Vaal Barrage. Rand Water reports show the continuing high level of pollutants in various parts of the river in this area. Polluted water flows through the Vaal Barrage to impact on Parys and other communities downstream.

It is true that the Minister of Water and Sanitation, Lindiwe Sisulu, has taken a leadership role in the Vaal Intervention Project which aims to repair the Emfuleni waste water treatment system. The Department of Water and Sanitation is now directly responsible for this project and has stated that the contract with ERWAT, which expires at the end of June, will not be extended. There's a long way to go before we see a sewage pollution-free Vaal River in the Emfuleni area.

The completion of the expansion to the Sebokeng Waste Water Treatment Plant is a step in the right direction. This project started several years ago and came to a standstill in 2018 due to lack of funds. It was 96% complete at that point. Under the Minister's watch, this project was re-started in mid-May 2020. There's not too far to go and July 2020 seems to be a realistic completion date. The new module will treat about one third of the Sebokeng treatment plant's waste water when it is operational. The rest of the Sebokeng plant has not been working since it was vandalised two years ago. Work is required on that plant so that the remaining two thirds of sewage can be properly treated. There is no information available as to when effluent pumped into the Rietspruit from this plant will be fully compliant with required standards.

Many of the 44 pump stations remain dysfunctional. ERWAT did some work to unblock pipes in the sewage network. The benefits will only be seen when all pump and treatment plants are fully operational. The impact of the dysfunctional pump stations is particularly noticeable in Vereeniging with ongoing high sewage pollution levels in the river and in the streets.

Work is required on the Rietspruit plant which is currently operating at some 30% of its capacity and has been steadily deteriorating for years. Yet, its repair programme has been left continuously on the back burner. This plant continues to be a major contributor to pollution of the Rietspruit and Vaal Rivers and has caused a build-up of some 1,5 m of black

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sludge on the riverbed where the Rietspruit enters Loch Vaal. It continues to pump poorly treated sewage into the Rietspruit.

Minister Sisulu has assured SAVE in writing that funds are earmarked for the continuation of the project to stop Vaal River pollution. SAVE is dissatisfied with the progress that has been made in the Vaal Intervention Project and is equally unhappy with the level of communication which is not meeting expectations. This has been communicated to the Minister through our attorney.

In October 2019, SAVE agreed to suspend litigation to give the intervention team an opportunity to show progress. SAVE has been unable to resume court proceedings due to the lockdown. Unless there's a drastic improvement in both progress and communication SAVE will have no option but to continue its court proceedings against the authorities.

### **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

SAVE'S AGM has had to be postponed due to the lockdown. This meeting will be rescheduled as soon as it is possible to do so.

### **CONTRIBUTIONS**

Please keep up your support for this worthy project.

