



MEDIA STATEMENT BY BENCH MARKS FOUNDATION

Steps to reduce the impact of acid mine drainage is seven years too late

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For immediate release

South Africa's water situation is in dire straits with acid mine drainage causing havoc by polluting our natural groundwater in several areas in the country. The Bench Marks Foundation therefore welcomes the news that South Africa's Water Research Council (WRC) plans to reduce the intervals between its studies on the country's water resources.

The Bench Marks Foundation which monitors corporate performance in the field of corporate social responsibility with the focus on social sustainability and economic empowerment has been lobbying for change in the mining industry particularly with regard to environmental issues since its inception in 2003.

"Although it is seven years too late (the last assessment done by WRC was done in 2005), reducing the period may mitigate further disasters such as we are currently experiencing in South Africa," said John Capel, Executive Director at Bench Marks Foundation.

Capel said the organisation issued warnings about the effect of acid mine drainage as long ago as 2007 in its first Policy Gap report, together with information regarding the effect of pumping water out of aquifers, the perforation of dykes and the possible development of fissures due to the pumping out of underground water.

"If government and mining companies took heed of our warnings and implemented the recommendations given in that report not only in the North West Province, but in the rest of South Africa, the emergency measures currently being undertaken in places such as Springs, Germiston and Roodepoort would not have been necessary,

"All the short-term solutions undertaken by the Department of Water Affairs such as the proposed desalination of acid mine water should have been part of a longer-term plan that could have been introduced long ago."

Capel also said that there is little capacity at both local government and district government levels to monitor the quality of water and the Bench Marks Foundation hopes that this move by the WRC will finally resolve a number of the gaps in this regard.

"There are just too many mining companies operating without water licenses and this is causing further havoc with our water resources. It seems the problem is just going to get worse," said Capel.

Some of the recommendations given in the reports include projects that would not only address a number of the negative impacts of mining on the environment, but would create a large amount of

jobs. To view the Policy Gap series of reports (there are five reports), go to www.benchmarks.org.za.

The Bench Marks Foundation was launched in 2001 by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in response to the churches' call in 1993 to monitor and hold businesses accountable in the new South Africa and in Southern Africa. It is chaired by Bishop Jo Seoka.

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Bench Marks Foundation is an independent organisation monitoring corporate performance in the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) with the focus on social sustainability and economic empowerment. The organisation encourages CSR that goes beyond reporting mechanisms and focuses on the gap between policy and practice, thereby assisting civil society groups and corporations to move beyond philanthropy to more strategic interventions that benefit both the corporations and society. Central to Bench Marks' agenda is how CSR is integrated into companies' operations and ensuring that it is at the core of every decision making process.

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