

No, this is the reason why no new dams will be built!

By Tian Claassens

I read the article: "[*Why Cape Town isn't building another dam*](#)" published by Cape {town} etc and shared on The Village News yesterday and I immediately felt I have to respond to what was written there. The article deals mainly with some of the history of the Berg River Dam and relates that history to why no more dams will be built. Let us start with the Berg River Dam ~

1. As stated in the article, the Berg River Dam was completed around 2008. From an initial cost estimate of just over R1.0 billion, the final cost escalated to well over R3.5 billion.
2. Even at the initial cost estimate, the cost of the water delivered to Cape Town was prohibitively expensive – this was mainly because of the relatively small yield of the dam compared to its relatively high capital cost.
3. At the final cost, the dam represents a massive tax burden on Capetonians without really contributing significantly to the City's overall drought resilience. A true 'white elephant' if ever there was one....
4. A 'silent' fact is that a significant portion of the water content of the dam is transferred from Theewaterskloof Dam – from there my comment that it does not really contribute significantly to the drought resilience of Cape Town.

The fact of the matter is that the Berg River Dam should never have been built. The article states that: "An environmental impact assessment done after the completion of the dam...". This is a shocking admission how poorly the project was planned and executed. When was the last time that anyone has heard of an EIA conducted post-the-event of such a major construction works? No, trying to blame the poor yield and performance (read economics) of the dam on an EIA is just part of the ongoing cover-up of how the thing was botched at an enormous cost to Cape Town residents.

As stated above this dam should never have been built. But it is not for the environmental reasons presented in the article. The fact of the matter is that there were other potential projects that would have yielded significantly more water at a fraction of the cost. Moreover, were some of those projects implemented at the time, they would have contributed much more to the drought resilience of the City.

When the Berg River Dam was planned (in the early 2000's), Cape Town's daily water consumption was around 600 million liters per day. This consumption translated into about 400

million liters of sewage effluent. The majority of this sewage effluent was treated by the City and then dumped into the sea (mostly False Bay). A portion of the sewage was (and still is!) dumped into the sea without any treatment.

One of the alternative projects that could (and should!) have been embarked upon when the Berg River Dam was planned, is the re-use of a significant portion of the fresh water that the City dumps into the sea every day. A project that would have yielded around 200 million liters of water daily would cost a fraction of what the Berg River Dam costed.

At the height of its consumption (before the drought induced water restrictions), Cape Town was consuming around 1 200 million liters per day – generating close to 800 million liters of sewage effluent (i.e. fresh water) dumped into the sea. For readers of The Village News (Overstranders) it is important to note that the majority of this water dumped by the City into the sea, originated from Theewaterskloof Dam. Why is this important to us? Water taken out of Theewaterskloof Dam and the Riviersonderend System represents a significant economic cost to the Overberg region. We are deprived of the water for irrigation purposes or for enhancing the drought resilience of our own towns and villages. If Cape Town can get water from Theewaterskloof Dam, then why not Hermanus and surrounds? I am not advocating that Cape Town should be deprived of its largest source of water, BUT I am advocating that the enormous wastage of that precious resource by the City is in fact depriving us of that water.

This ongoing wastage of precious fresh water that is dumped into the sea by the City is continuing unabated till today. That is the reason why no new dams will be built. It will simply be madness to build another dam while this wastage is still raging on. It was madness to build the Berg River Dam.....