

Radio switches on listeners to Eastern Cape water crisis

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The power of radio is being used to help drive home the water crisis facing Nelson Mandela Bay and other areas of the Eastern Cape.



Levels of dams serving the metro, which includes Port Elizabeth, Uitenhage, Despatch and Coega, have dropped to crisis level, while water restrictions have had little effect on consumption.

In response Algoa FM presenter Charlton Tobias took to the air as part of a multimedia campaign which included live crossings from the dams and the use of Algoa FM's website and print.

"It was shocking to see how low the water levels are," says presenter, Charlton Tobias. "The water levels for our biggest dam have dropped below 45 percent! This is definitely a wake-up call for the public."

The Nelson Mandela Bay municipality has been urging the public to conserve water for some time, and Algoa FM came up with a multimedia campaign to help get the message across more clearly.

"We have embarked on a visual, audio and social networking campaign," says Chris Wright New Media Manager at Algoa FM. "We reach over 700 000 listeners throughout the province and we've posted photos of the empty dams on our website to help make a visual impact. Our presenters are also continuously reminding the public about the water crisis to ensure maximum exposure to the situation."

There was a 59 per cent increase in unique visitors to the website as listeners clicked through to see the dramatic pictures of the empty dams.

The radio station's Facebook fan page has also been inundated with comments from listeners expressing their surprise at the severity of the situation. "It's scary to see water levels this low," noted one listener. Another queried whether the Eastern Cape would have enough water to support visitors during the FIFA World Cup in June.

The awareness campaign was also supported by Eastern Cape newspaper, *Die Burger* which printed the shocking photos on its front page on Tuesday, December 19, 2010.

According to Dewald Coetzee, director of Southern Operations for the Department of Water Affairs, "The amount of water available for domestic and industrial use in Nelson Mandela Bay is around 35 percent.

"Looking at the current situation, the consumption in the Metro, and the allocated amount of water for farm irrigation, our water will last us for another year if we don't urgently start saving water," said Coetzee.

The awareness campaign has already had a major impact with a number of Algoa FM listeners calling in to express their shock at the dire situation.

"Many listeners knew that there was a water shortage, but now they are aware of how bad it really is," says Tobias. "I think taking a multimedia approach helped give people an idea of the 'bigger picture' and reached thousands of Eastern Cape residents through various means of communication."

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