



tourism

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Statement by the office of the Minister of Tourism, Mr Marthinus van Schalkwyk, on the occasion of the speech delivered at the Public Lecture; North West University Potchefstroom Campus, as part of World Tourism Day 2013 Celebrations

Tourism and Water: Protecting our common future

26 September 2013

Before I make a couple of remarks about the theme of today's lecture, let me first ask you a question.

Let's assume that there are a few of you here from Pretoria and after this event you must drive back home which is about 180 km. If your car only has fuel to cover 100km's of the journey, who here would hit the road knowing very well that they will definitely run out of fuel and end up being stranded?

But then, how inexplicable is this: What I do not understand is why, collectively, we are willing to consume the earth's resources at a much faster pace than the earth can regenerate? Why are we willing to borrow from future generations if we know we are depleting resources at a rate that will land our children and their children in trouble? Why is this generation using more water, consuming more electricity and dumping more waste than they are entitled to, knowing very well that the next generation will be paying the price?

Last year, globally, we consumed about 1.5 times the natural resources that the earth can regenerate. Stated differently, by August last year we had already consumed about as much as the earth was able to replenish during the whole year. This year, again, we will use up resources equivalent to about 1.5 planets. But we only have one planet. So, we are passing the buck to those who will inhabit this earth after us. But sooner or later, because we are borrowing from the future, resources will dry up, pollution will accumulate beyond a critical point and livelihoods would be dramatically impacted. Simply put, we will bankrupt the next generation.

Consider, for example, the average carbon footprint of a South African. What is regarded as sustainable, or manageable from an environmental perspective, globally, is about one tonne of carbon dioxide emissions per person per year by 2050. However, in South Africa, each of us, on average, emit about 9 tons of carbon dioxide every year. Globally, the average is just over 4 tonnes per person per year. But we know there are simply not enough carbon sinks, for example forests, to naturally sequester these emissions. If we were to continue to pollute in this way, the global temperature is bound to increase by more than two degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels during this century. And then we will breach critical ecological tipping points beyond which damage becomes irreversible. Many of the natural resources on which we depend in the tourism economy will then become depleted at a much faster rate. It may be through the loss of species, the bleaching of coral reefs or other biodiversity impacts, sea level rise and coastal erosion, the spread of vector-borne diseases such as malaria and cholera, drought and land degradation, loss of food security, and so on.

In short, if we continue to borrow from the future at the current rate, we will kill off, among others, the future reservoir of natural resources that we need for sustainable tourism growth.

The same applies to water as many touristic activities depend very directly on water, not least golf courses, rivers and lakes, pools and spas, irrigated gardens and hotel guest rooms. For others the dependence on water is indirect, for example tourism activities that depend on fauna and flora, a moderate climate, and so on. In the UNEP Green Economy report it is estimated that the average tourist consumes about 300 litres of water per day, with so-called luxury tourists consuming more than 800 litres per day. This should be compared to the consumption of, on average, only 240 litres per day in affluent European households. In poor communities the average daily consumption – often next door to luxury resorts – can be a fraction. In this context, it is tough to justify, for example, the estimated 9.5 billion litres of water required to irrigate golf courses around the world every day.

Of all the water on earth, only 3% is fresh water that we can drink. The rest is seawater. Of this fresh water, 5/6^{ths} are frozen. This leaves humankind and the eco-system with only 0.5% of all water to continue life on earth. Humankind's cut of this 0.5% needs to be shared amongst households, consuming about 10%, industry and power generation consuming 20%, and agriculture 70%. Exacerbated by rapid urbanisation, water reserves are often not where they are needed most. Consequently, it already presents a binding constraint on the growth of cities and economies in many parts of the world.

If we use too much, pollute too much, or use water inefficiently, sooner or later water stress kicks in, people go hungry and eco-systems collapse – along with the downfall of health and sanitation, economic development and tourism.

Here, in this part of the world in the Northwest province, the predicted increase in frequency and intensity of heavy rains, prolonged periods with no rain and generally more unreliable rainfall patterns, threaten the integrity of vital wildlife tourism offerings.

We are particularly vulnerable to water stress in Africa, and especially in southern Africa. By 2020, between 75 million and 250 million people are likely to experience water shortages as a result of climate change. In combination with increased demand, this will adversely affect livelihoods, freshwater fish resources and agricultural production. In some countries, yields from rain-fed agriculture could be reduced by up to 50% in the next decade. And at a societal level, community and inter-state conflict over water resources is already a reality. It is already a headline geopolitical issue. This underlying conflict potential is exacerbated by post-colonial arrangements which are generally not conducive to mitigating conflict or competition over water resources.

Consider, for example, the fact that almost 40% of Africa's international borders are demarcated by river channels and basin watersheds, and that most major rivers traverse national boundaries. These resources are sensitive to even moderate reductions in rainfall as are predicted to occur in many places across Africa. Not only will increased scarcity of water resources threaten the sustainability of hydro-electric power generation, irrigation, agricultural production, fish stocks, food security, transport and industry, and tourism activities, but it could also contribute to an increase in inter-communal and inter-state migrations and tensions.

A key challenge and opportunity in Africa is to use trans-boundary water resource management to reduce conflict potential, to enhance peace-making by opening new avenues for dialogue, and to promote regional integration.

The UNEP Green Economy Report modelled the massive gap between global water supply and water withdrawals. They projected that, if current inefficient water use had to continue along a business-as-usual path, water demand will overshoot supply by 40 per cent in 20 years' time. Our best efforts to improve water productivity and to increase supply, for example through recycling, the construction of dams and the introduction of desalination plants, will close less than half of this gap. What will be required is massive new investment in more efficient water infrastructure and water management, water-policy reform. This will include appropriate water pricing and allocation, and the development of new technology, for

example, to increase the productivity of irrigated agriculture.

Programme Director, what stands clear, is that the nexus between energy, climate, water and food will shape the future landscape for tourism. But let's be clear on this: When we address this challenge our mind-set should not be one of competition between tourism and the environment. The relationship between tourism and the environment, including water, is first and foremost one of dependence, not competition. Tourism depends on these natural resources, or it will die. But that is not the complete story. The dependency also runs in the other direction. The sustainability of many natural resources – think for example of national parks, natural heritage sites, marine protected areas or botanical gardens – depends very directly for its survival on the income generated by tourism. Investing in tourism is therefore critical to sustaining biodiversity and eco-system conservation.

I would like to conclude. In dealing with the tourism-water challenge, we should be flexible and pro-active in our planning and continuously integrate the latest scientific findings and practical experience. We must learn to expect the unexpected, and continuously ask ourselves how new evidence of climate change and water stress will impact the tourism sector, and how each of us can contribute to reducing emissions and water consumption. In hotels this may involve retrofitting water-saving technology in rooms, switching to grey water to irrigate golf courses, educating consumers, collecting rainwater or reverting to indigenous landscaping. These low-hanging fruit are mostly negative cost options, meaning that they save costs over time; they have short payback cycles.

Globally, in South Africa and in every community we must all do more and act with a greater sense of urgency. Let's adapt where we face the inevitable; to paraphrase the businessman, Brand Pretorius: Let's not wait for the storm to pass, but rather learn to dance in the rain.

Thank you.

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