

Opinion & analysis

The Herald

Editorial Comment Health department keeps on fumbling

The Eastern Cape health crisis is nothing new and once again the chronic state of the province's health department has been laid bare by its incompetence. The department, and all the state hospitals and clinics that fall under it, limp from one crisis to the next on a weekly basis. The latest is a young boy who urgently needs life-saving ventriculoperitoneal (VP) shunt surgery.

Every day that goes by without Clewen Smith, 6, having the surgery means that the fluid continues to build up in his brain.

He has now been waiting for more than 30 days. The reason for the delay is simple, but the consequences of the hold-up could be fatal for Clewen.

It is feared that he might die because Gqeberha's Livingstone Hospital have had no shunts available for the past month for doctors to perform the procedure.

On February 7, he was transported to the Provincial Hospital and then to Livingstone Hospital, where he has been confined to his bed ever since.

The hospital ordered the 10 shunts from a supplier last year but instead, only inducers arrived.

A shunt was expected to arrive yesterday, with Clewen's surgery booked for today.

But why was this family made to wait for 30 days for a device that relieves pressure on the brain caused by a fluid accumulation?

This should never happen as a hospital the size of Livingstone should be well stocked with such devices and many others for elective surgeries.

Health department spokesperson Yonela Dekeda's excuse that certain companies withheld further orders if their accounts were in arrears at a provincial level, despite the facility having an available budget, is inexcusable.

Companies deserve to be paid after supplying stock and this is likely the cause of Livingstone Hospital not being able to receive the shunts.

The problems in the health department start at the top and trickle down — eventually putting a boy's life at risk.

Inefficient procurement processes such as in this case undermine access to healthcare, while proper planning enhances the quality that can be offered to patients.

A boy's life has been put at risk due to the well-known systemic issues that have crippled the health department.

A remedy is needed urgently to fix the dysfunctional department.

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Onerous processes snuffing out spark of hope for energy supply

Mandated with cutting red tape across government, Siphon Nkosi has a daunting task as head of the new unit within the presidency.

There's so much red tape. But this one area is so important to our economic recovery that it needs special attention.

The cumbersome processes private companies are still required to navigate before being allowed to generate their own electricity are extreme.

They completely undermine what President Cyril Ramaphosa was trying to achieve when he scrapped the need for a licence for self-generation energy plants of up to 100MW — energy security.

We have an ongoing electricity supply crisis that is a binding constraint on investment, growth and job creation. This needs to be resolved urgently.

After raising the limit, it would be madness to then require companies to go through the same documentation and approval processes they would

have had the limit not been lifted, right? Yet that is what electricity regulator Nersa requires companies to do — bar the public consultation process.

The registration process itself can only start once all the permissions have been obtained.

There are numerous other serious challenges to SA achieving its goal of having an efficient national grid and transmission system equipped to cater for a competitive energy market.

But this is low-hanging fruit, and if Nersa is unable to streamline the process, then government intervention is required.

I don't recommend that lightly for an independent regulator, but we have an energy supply deficit of 4-6GW.

This is a national emergency and should be treated as such.

A private company can build a renewable energy plan and have it running in two years, but applications are trickling in and no projects above 10MW are close to final approval.

The current process requires approval from several government departments, Nersa and Eskom, through complex processes.

To enable rapid development of new projects we need a separate government unit established specifically to process applications quickly.

To get the self-generation market up and running, such a unit would need a clear policy on wheeling — a cookie-cutter model that applies across SA to all municipalities.

What we have now are endless bespoke agreements as each municipality is supposed to apply a wheeling tariff — the cost to transmit electricity from the generating plant to where it is needed — and then Nersa has to approve it.

Further electricity market liberalisation is also required to de-risk willing buyer-willing seller investments in generation.

Self-generation companies do not have the security of the 20-year power purchase agreements with Eskom that energy



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BUSI MAVUSO

generators in the Renewable Energy Independent Power Producers Procurement Programme secure through the bidding process.

These are capital-intensive endeavours by the private sector that will relieve pressure on Eskom's supply, but they are exposed to fluctuations in commodity prices and exchange rates, among other risks. A national energy trad-

ing market will de-risk investments and spur more self-generation plants.

These are measures we can institute short term to streamline processes to get more energy produced and put load-shedding behind us. We can't afford bureaucratic delays.

Just last week, Eskom CEO André de Ruyter announced that more than 4,000ha of Eskom land in Mpumalanga would become available to lease through auction by the end of this year, and it would start approaching the market as early as April.

This is part of a wider plan to lease 36,000ha for renewable energy generation. It would be tragic for that process to be thwarted by bureaucracy.

At the African Energy Indaba, De Ruyter outlined a longer-term challenge that needs more than slashing red tape: Upgrading and expanding the existing transmission infrastructure to accommo-

date new generation capacity will require investment of R180bn over the next decade.

The numbers seem daunting: 5,800km of new power lines need to be built by 2031 — 73% more than Eskom has built in the previous five years.

Our energy system is struggling to cope with the changes it is undergoing. Let's not forget Eskom celebrates its 100th anniversary in 2023 and operated as a pure monopoly for 88 of those.

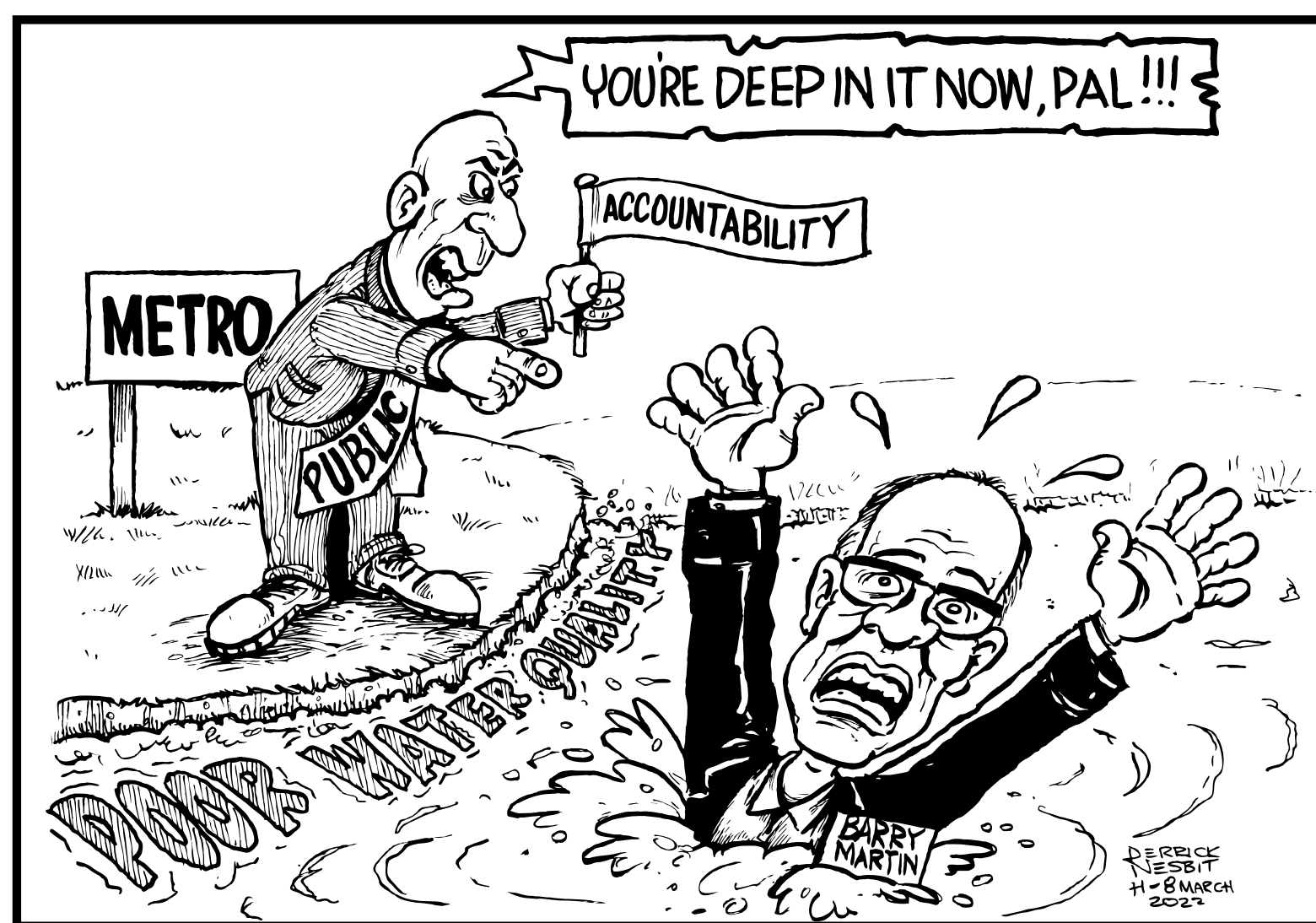
Our energy market must adapt to climate-change imperatives while facing the energy supply crisis.

We cannot allow red tape to hold up the short-term measures.

The next target of upgrading the transmission system to cope with the new generation seems the perfect mechanism with which to kick-start that elusive R1-trillion infrastructure programme.

● *Busi Mavuso is CEO of Business Leadership SA*

cartoon by derrick nesbit



today in history

1902 Towards the end of the Second South African War (Anglo-Boer War 2), the Boers' General De la Rey releases General Lord Methuen after his wounds are treated. Methuen and more than 870 British soldiers were captured by De La Rey in the Battle of Tweebosch the day before.

1917 March 8 is declared International Women's Day

1986 Moses Mabhida, trade unionist, politician, MK commander and secretary-general of the SACP, dies of a heart attack in Mozambique. In 2006, Mabhida's remains are transferred to SA for reburial in KwaZulu-Natal

1994 Persistent tensions in Bophuthatswana come to a head after the homeland's government decided against registering for the election and the ANC called for a blockade of the territory

Source: SA History Online

Community has role to play in managing reserves

The Eastern Cape has the highest level of biodiversity in SA.

As such, it is important to protect the province's flora and fauna from habitat loss, alien species, pollution, human activity and overconsumption.

To achieve this, many nature reserves and protected areas have been established.

From the Silaka Nature Reserve close to the northern border, to the Garden Route National Park in the south, the province has an abundance of areas in which reserves have been established alongside communities.

The Dwesa-Cwebe Nature Reserve on the Wild Coast is 5,450ha of hills and grassland interspersed with woodland and patches of forest supporting a diversity of animal and bird life.

To this add the 19,293ha Dwesa-Cwebe Marine Protected Area that supports many

marine species. The level of biodiversity in both the marine and land environments is important in sustaining local livelihoods and tourism.

Residents who make up the local community in the area are mainly amaXhosa who have lived here for hundreds of years and for whom the land holds historical, cultural and livelihood significance.

This community makes use of a range of natural local resources including thatch, sand and clay, wood, reeds, plants, bush meat, fish and shellfish to sustain and maintain livelihoods. Grazing resources are also important.

When reserves such as Dwesa-Cwebe were established, the vested interests of local communities was not always well considered.

While the balancing of human activities vs protecting the environment lies at the heart of

conservation discourse, this can be problematic for communities who depend on natural resources.

The proclamation of protected areas in the form of national parks and provincial nature and game reserves in SA has led to dispossession, relocation and restrictions on entry for local communities.

They have been deprived of or limited from accessing the natural resources contained within the borders of these reserves.

This has led to fractured relationships with reserve management, where communities may view conservation rights and the economic advancement of few as more important than their rights, needs and best interests.

In a postapartheid era, it is essential to devise strategies promoting a more inclusive, participatory and human-cent-

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LUYOLO MAHLANGABEZA AND LOYISO ZWELAKHE

tered approach to conservation. Interventions are required where the management of reserves and parks work with communities to harmonise preservation aims with community livelihoods.

A range of laws and policies have been introduced to promote conservation objectives while advancing the land reform agenda.

In the case of Dwesa-Cwebe this led to the establishment of Community Property Associations (CPAs). The main objective of the CPAs was to provide for community participation in the management and use of land and natural resources in

the reserve. A study was conducted among members of the Dwesa-Cwebe CPA to determine if they experienced a sense of inclusion, ownership and meaningful participation in the management and protection of the reserve.

Community members felt they were seen as unequipped with skills related to nature reserve management. A lack of historic access to educational structures lies at the heart of this perceived inadequacy.

Community members believe they possess indigenous knowledge of the area and that this knowledge could be used in management of the reserve.

There is merit in this, both in terms of promoting a more inclusive approach to knowledge management and fostering a deeper sense of commitment to conservation management objectives.

Community members also

highlighted a lack of consultation in relation to activities directly linked to their daily lives, such as shellfish harvesting and grazing access.

Again, this is a call for the recognition of indigenous knowledge in contributing towards conservation practices.

Community ownership and participation in the management of reserves should promote sustainable development through providing income-generating opportunities.

It was reported that while Dwesa-Cwebe was generating revenue, CPA members were not aware how this money was being used.

Transparency should prevail and community members should understand how income generated is used. Further, greater participation in the management of the reserve could allow CPA members to identify revenue-generating

opportunities that could be funded, and a portion of the revenue directed towards community development initiatives.

It was also found that community participation largely takes place through consultation forums. Members do not see these forums as truly participative.

A more bottom-up consultative approach would allow for greater discourse and understanding of the roles, responsibilities and accountability of different stakeholders.

There is an imbalance in the relationship between the CPAs and reserve management. It seems a brittle relationship that is not based on trust.

Active participation of local communities leads to more interest and involvement in conservation initiatives. Focusing on community participation in conservation has ecological

and socioeconomic benefit.

It is therefore important that the management and conservation of nature reserves focus on realising win-win outcomes and minimising trade-offs between environmental and socioeconomic considerations.

It is only then that nature reserves such as Dwesa-Cwebe will be able to truly conserve the biodiversity of our provinces and preserve the rights and interests of the people who reside in these areas.

● *Luyolo Mahlangabeza is a lecturer and research supervisor in the faculty of business and economic sciences at the Nelson Mandela University. Loyiso Zwelakhe is a former student in the faculty. This article is based on a paper originally published by the authors in the Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences. The views are those of the authors and not NMU*