

VC's PUBLIC FORUM

Water: A Source of Life, A Source of Death?

8 March 2010

Welcome to the third VC's Public Forum.

The first, in 2008, was on *The Implications of President Mbeki's recall for politics and democracy in South Africa?*

The second, in 2009, was on *How Healthy is our Constitutional Democracy?*

This evening's Public Forum is on *Water: A Source of Life, A Source of Death?*

For some time, and especially since recent articles in the Daily Dispatch and the Grocott's, there have been concerns and understandable anxieties about the quality of water for human consumption in Rhini/Grahamstown.

This evening we feature a panel of five natural and social scientists, all from Rhodes University.

They have been invited to briefly address us and engage with us in an exercise of public reasoning on the issue of water quality in Rhini/Grahamstown and pertinent related issues.

I will introduce the panel members shortly.

However, to begin with, a short snippet made by our very own Journalism and Media Studies students.

Before our panel members address us, I wish to make two comments.

First, the availability, provision and quality of water are not only scientific issues but also social, political and economic issues as well as issues of public and institutional policy.

There are diverse societal and public as well as individual and private interests connected to water.

Claims and counter-claims about water quality should not be reduced to specific interests, but such interests should not be entirely ignored either.

Second, in much as the science and social, political and economic dimensions of water quality may be interesting, most of us are likely to be ultimately interested in the answers to questions such as:

- “Is it safe for us the residents of Rhini/Grahamstown to drink the water that flows out of our taps’?

- Who can tell us authoritatively about whether we can or should not drink the water?

Can Rhodes play a role in this regard and should it, and with implications?

In other words, for most of us it is policy that we are interested in and honest and clear directives that we want.

To move on to the panel, the panel members are, beginning with the soft sciences:

- Prof. Denis Hughes, Director of the Institute for Water Research
- Prof. Nelson Torto of the Chemistry Department, an Analytical Chemist specialising in Water Quality
- Prof. Janice Limson, who is Head of Biotechnology in the Department of Biochemistry, Microbiology and Biotechnology
- Prof. Ric Bernard, who is Dean of the Faculty of Science and is able to speak on the physiological effects of water-based substances and, from the hard sciences
- Prof. Greg Ruiters, who is Director of the Institute for Social and Economic Research.

We invited Makana Municipality to participate on the panel but they declined.

There are also other people who are in the audience that we have invited to participate on the basis of their involvement in water quality issues.

Each speaker will address the Forum for a maximum of 9 minutes. Thereafter the Forum will be opened to questions, comments and contributions from you the other participants in this Forum.

We must vacate this lecture theatre at 18.30 so that it can be prepared for a test.

Panel

Discussion

Closing

Thank you to the panel and to you all for attending and participating in this Forum.

Thank you too to all the different divisions at Rhodes for their support in convening this Forum.

The VC's Public Forum is intended to be an occasional public space for members of the Rhodes community and the public at large to discuss significant contemporary political, economic and social issues and concerns.

Is there are any comments on this evening's Forum, any further issues regarding water quality or any suggestions on future topics for the VC's Public Forum please email these to Mr Lebogang Hashatse, our Director of Communication.