

Transport dept launches Inland Waters Strategy

The Department of Transport has shone the spotlight on safety during the launch of the Inland Waters Strategy (IWS) on Friday.



Source: [SAGov News](#)

Delivering her keynote address at Lake Deney's Yacht Club at the Vaal Dam, Deputy Minister Sindisiwe Chikunga said the strategy would ensure that all boating activities are done safely and responsibly in the future.

"If we practice safe boating, we can save lives and redirect millions spent on the Court of Marine Enquiries towards training and development of communities surrounding inland waters," said Chikunga.

The IWS comes after Minister Fikile Mbalula unveiled the S'hamba Sonke programme during the launch of October Transport Month.

According to the Deputy Minister, South Africa has hundreds of dams that have the potential to be used for boating activities, excluding all the rivers, lagoons and estuaries.

"This strategy will ensure that these activities can be done safely by all and help to protect our inland waters from pollution."

The plan also aims to ensure that buoys and lights are standardised to ensure safe navigation, and provide a level of protection to citizens who use inland waters for swimming and other recreational activities.

"The harmonisation and standardisation of safe navigation will assist in curbing the many-recorded boating accidents," said Chikunga.

She said the sector has recorded a spike in recorded accidents is a serious concern.

According to the latest statistics, the country has had six Court of Marine Inquiries, which attended to boating accidents that claimed 43 lives.

The Deputy Minister described the country as a maritime nation and a port State with an almost 3,000-kilometre coastline.

"This coastline boasts of limitless possibilities as a game-changer," she said.

She believes that collectively, South Africa could spearhead an unprecedented maritime oriented economic stimulus, which could potentially fast track socio-economic recovery reforms, especially after the devastating effects of the Covid-19 pandemic.

She said South Africa has extensive inland waters, which are underutilised.

"Countries of the world, which have inland waters, use this natural resource to create employment and generate revenue."

According to Chikunga, inland waters as a national natural resource, have a huge economic and environmental potential, which could be a drawcard for tourists' attraction, create careers and contribute to the national skills sets.

Operation Phakisa

The Deputy Minister said the potential of inland waters tie in with the objectives of the Operation Phakisa strategy, which is a Presidential initiative aimed at unlocking the economic potential of South African waters.

This includes marine manufacturing, shipbuilding and ship repairs, which the Deputy Minister described as lucrative opportunities.

"It is hoped that low-income communities surrounding inland waters can be roped in to participate in this potential and create sustainable entrepreneurship opportunities."

Chikunga believes that the marine tourism and leisure fraternity should be advanced for entrepreneurship opportunities.

"There are opportunities for previously disadvantaged youth to be qualified as small vessel skippers," she explained, adding that these qualifications are normally overlooked.

However, she thinks that many jobs can be created within the small boating industry.

She hopes that South Africa can use small vessel skippers as crew and skippers of small fishing vessels, harbour tour vessels and various other vessel commercial operations that are normally overlooked.

"From there, they can even migrate over to larger vessels and thereby create even more job opportunities. South Africa also builds many small vessels, which are then exported to other countries around the world."

Meanwhile, she said the vessels that use inland water should be well regulated and have the necessary safety equipment.

This includes killing switches and buoyancy aids to protect users from drowning or injuries.

"Just like a car driving on the road, drinking and driving kills people when a vessel is operated on a waterway under the influence."

According to the Deputy Minister, the promulgation of the Merchant Shipping National Small Vessel Safety Regulations (MSVSR) in 2007 brought about the establishment of a new regime for small vessels on inland waters.

She said the amendments saw the inclusion of MSVSR, which introduced the surveying and the identification of small vessels, strengthening of safety awareness efforts, setting of examination standards, issuing of certificates for competency, as well as the introduction of compliance and accident and incident investigations.

The department has also encouraged yacht and other sporting clubs in South Africa to engage in community sport development and transformation programmes.

"Let our inland waters be shared by all with safe and responsible boating, and become financially and economically beneficial to all South Africans."

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