

# Kuiseb Basin Management Committee — the first of its kind in Namibia

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It's easy to convince yourself that your water needs are justified, never excessive, completely rational and fair. After all, you've always had enough water in the past — why shouldn't you continue having 'enough' now? This is where we come up against the argument of sustainability. With all the competing demands for water, especially in our dry country, we are reaching the ceiling, or rather the floor, of water availability. It has become a matter of urgency to ensure that water and the resources dependent on water are not over-exploited, that we use water efficiently, and that the resource is shared equitably amongst all its various users.

To put this into practice involves all the stakeholders interested in a particular bucket of water sitting down together and discussing how best to share it amongst themselves and the environment, and how to ensure that it is always replenished. More simply said than done. But this is actually what has been happening in the Kuiseb River Basin and amongst the people with a vested interest in using its water and related resources. After two and half years of co-operation by the stakeholders of the Kuiseb River Basin, a committee has been formed to serve the needs of the basin and to help

in advising on actions and developments in it.

The Kuiseb Basin Management Committee, or KBMC as it is most often referred to, has met three times since its inception in October 2003 and has been working diligently to set itself up as an organised and functioning committee. It comprises ten members, representing NamWater, Walvis Bay Municipality, Gobabeb Centre (in the Namib Desert), communal farmers (along the lower reaches of the Kuiseb), commercial farmers (mostly in the Khomas Hochland and upper catchment areas), Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development through the Department of Water Affairs, Ministry of Environment and Tourism, Erongo Regional Council, Khomas Regional Council, and an environmental organisation called the Coastal Environment Trust of Namibia.

On April 28 this year, stakeholders from these organisations and further afield came together at the Gobabeb Training and Research Centre, situated on the banks of the ephemeral Kuiseb River, to witness the official launching of the KBMC by the Honourable Helmut Angula, Minister of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development (MAWRD). He was joined by Abraham Nehemia, Director of



*The Honourable Minister of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development, Helmut Angula, officially launching the Kuiseb Basin Management Committee at Gobabeb in April 2004.*

the Directorate of Rural Water Supply and Berend Rothkegel, Director of the Directorate of Planning. The KBMC has come about through the activities of the Kuiseb Basin Stakeholders Forum, which in turn was initiated through a project entitled Interactive Environmental Learning and Action in the Kuiseb (ELAK) which has been implemented by the Desert Research Foundation of Namibia with funding from the EU.

Minister Angula said, "It gives me great pleasure to be here to witness the official inauguration of the KBMC... the first official basin management committee solely initiated and set up by all those concerned with the

sustainable management of the basin." He noted that "Government has been managing water resources in this country from a central level with minimal or no involvement of users on the ground. This is no longer going to be the case... the best management practice for water resources is by means of carrying it out at a basin level." Minister Angula explained that the Government has initiated a process to ensure that the precious resource is properly managed for the benefit of all Namibians, and will set up basin management committees in all Namibia's river basins. Citing a number of factors that have increased pressure on the water resources in Namibia,



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the Minister stated: “There is a need to make some major shifts in our approach to managing this renewable but finite resource, and a committee such as the Kuseb Basin Management Committee is highly instrumental in achieving Government’s objectives, as well as the aspirations of the people on the ground.”

Andre Brummer, Head of the Waste, Water and Environment Division within the Municipality of Walvis Bay, is the first chairperson of the KBMC. In the opening ceremony, he informed the gathering of the efforts made by the Committee to devise a constitution to guide its functions, and to draw up a broad-based strategic plan covering

the entire basin to guide its operation. The Committee is the vehicle to achieve the integration and co-ordination that is required amongst all the basin stakeholders. This is a clearly stated aim of the draft Water Resources Management Bill that is presently awaiting enactment in Parliament.

As an advisory body to the Ministry and Minister of MAWRD, the committee must work to promote community participation, prepare a water resources plan for the basin, make recommendations regarding the issuance of licences and permits, promote community self-reliance, cost recovery, maintenance and replacement of waterworks,

monitor and report on the effectiveness of policies and action, collect, manage and share data to properly manage the basin, develop a water-research agenda, and assist with conflict resolution within its water management area, quite a daunting list of responsibilities. The EU representative, Augustin Moyo-Collorado, noted the hard work and dedication of all involved in making the process and outcomes successful. The Minister himself congratulated the Kuseb stakeholders, the committee members and the ELAK project for its hard work and success, and wished them well in the endeavour to manage their basin properly.

The Kuseb is the first river basin in Namibia to establish a functional Basin Committee. MAWRD is in the process of setting up the next in the Cuvelai, the river basin of the oshanas in north-central Namibia, shared with Namibia’s northern neighbour, Angola. This will obviously be a much more complicated task, involving many more people and diverse demands.

With such a structure in place, however, and eventually in place in all the river basins in Namibia, it will be possible to address the demands of thirsty water consumers so that Namibia’s resources can be shared equitably, and used to the optimum benefit of all Namibians. ■