



PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

ORASECOM undertakes the second Joint Basin Survey

Water, especially in southern Africa, is our most precious natural resource. It is not only becoming increasingly limited as economies and populations grow, but rainfall is highly variable and unevenly spread across the region. Frequent droughts, often broken by severe flooding, have affected lives, slowed economic growth, and have posed significant challenges for water managers. Intensive use of limited water resources has affected their quality and has impacted on downstream river ecosystems. Climate change and variability may further exacerbate these problems.

Tackling these challenges is even more demanding when water crosses national borders. In these cases water managers in different countries need to work together to share water equitably and maximise the benefits for all countries sharing the river system. We need increasingly close cooperation if we are to continue to grow our economies, address poverty and protect the environment. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has provided a framework for countries sharing river systems to come together to address these challenges together – the Revised SADC Protocol on Shared Watercourses.

The Orange-Senqu River Commission (ORASECOM) was created to do exactly that. The organisation was established through an agreement between Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia and South Africa – the four countries that share the watercourse, and is one of the first shared river basin institutions to be established under the Revised SADC Protocol. This year ORASECOM celebrates 15 years of collaboration and cooperation.

The ORASECOM Agreement signed on 3 November 2000 tasks the Commission with advising these countries on the development, use and conservation of the water resources of the Orange-Senqu River Basin. To do this ORASECOM has, over the last 15 years focussed its attention on building a common understanding of the state of the system, understanding the key factors impacting on the system and on developing the tools that helped us to come up with a Basin Wide Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) Plan for the system by February this year. This second Joint Basin Survey continues this spirit of cooperation, and is the second joint survey of the current state of the quality of the water resources of the whole system supported by all the Member States. The survey includes sampling and analysis for a range of key substances, as well as ecosystem health at about 50 – 60 sites throughout the basin.

The Joint Basin Survey will include public events at five sites throughout the basin. The fourth of these events will be held in Parys, South Africa on 29 July 2015. The Parys site is particularly relevant for this survey as it lies just downstream of the largest economic centre in Africa. Gauteng's economy represents about 60% of the South African economy as a whole, and is highly dependent on the waters of the Orange-Senqu River Basin. Water is transferred from Lesotho to meet industrial, urban and mining demands in this part of the basin. This has knock-on benefits for the whole SADC Region. Unfortunately this intensive use of water, coupled with the need to treat and return this water to the rivers for use further downstream has impacted on the Vaal River System. This Joint Basin Survey will help us further understand and determine the current status of the quality of the basin and the water resources against which all the countries that share the basin can measure progress with management of the system.



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The Joint Basin Survey will include public events at five sites throughout the basin. The third of these events will be held in Upington, South Africa on 27 July 2015. Upington marks the start of the lower Orange River portion, and most arid part, of the basin. Agriculture in the Upington area, and further downstream, drives the economy of this part of the basin – creating jobs and supporting livelihoods. Irrigation in this area is entirely reliant on the Orange River. The Augrabies National Park, the transfrontier Richtersveld Park, and river rafting are also important tourism hubs, bringing money into the area. However, this is all reliant on river flows generated by rainfall further upstream in South Africa and Lesotho. Water flowing out of Lesotho, supplemented along the way by tributaries in South Africa, therefore enables and sustains the economy of this area, while demands from irrigation and mining in Namibia also need to be met out of this shared basin. Livelihoods in this area are therefore reliant on the joint management of the Orange-Senqu River Basin, through ORASECOM.



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The Joint Basin Survey will include public events at five sites throughout the basin. The first of these events will be held in Rosh Pinah, Namibia on 07 July 2015. The mining town of Rosh Pinah gets its water from the Orange River at Sendelingsdrift, which is one of the last major water abstraction points on the Orange-Senqu River. Mining represents a vital component of the Namibian economy, and irrigation along the lower Orange River is also a vital source of income and jobs for southern Namibia. This area of Namibia therefore relies on joint management of the whole basin, all the way upstream into South Africa and Lesotho. Only by joint management of the whole Orange-Senqu River Basin can ORASECOM ensure that there is sufficient good quality water to meet Namibia's needs in this part of the basin.



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The Joint Basin Survey will include public events at five sites throughout the basin. The fifth of these events will be held in Thaba Bosiu, Lesotho on 31 July 2015. While Lesotho only uses a very small portion of the water in the whole of the Orange-Senqu River Basin, it still plays an important role in the basin as over 40% of the water in the basin is generated by rainfall in Lesotho. This water sustains river ecosystems and livelihoods all the way downstream to Namibia in the lower reaches of the basin. However, Lesotho is also facing growing demands to use that water to improve the livelihoods of its people. Lesotho's participation in ORASECOM is therefore vital. Lesotho and South Africa also established the Lesotho Highlands Water Commission, and royalties paid on the water transferred to South Africa as part of the Lesotho Highlands Water Project are an important source of income for Lesotho, while the electricity generated by the scheme meets much of Lesotho's power needs.

The Caledon/Mohokare River is also shared between South Africa and Lesotho and must also be jointly managed. One of the main rivers that flow into the Caledon/Mohokare River, which is also used to supply water to the Maseru City and the surrounding towns, is the South Phuthiatsana River. The event on 31 July 2015 will include a demonstration to school children on how to assess the health of rivers at one of the points on the South Phuthiatsana River, near to Thaba Bosiu.



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The Joint Basin Survey will include public events at five sites throughout the basin. The second of these events will be held in Tsabong, Botswana on 10 July 2015. The region is mainly dependent on the shared groundwater for domestic use and pastoral farming. The underground water, is shared with both South Africa and Namibia. Unfortunately this underground water resource is severely limited and is already over-used. As a result of the overuse the quality has deteriorated over time, hence the need for Botswana to join forces with other Member States through ORASECOM to ensure careful management of this resource, as well as to explore other possible sources of water together with its neighbours.

It is therefore important that Botswana actively participates in ORASECOM. Water, especially in southern Africa, is our most precious natural resource. It is not only becoming increasingly limited as economies and populations grow, but rainfall is highly variable and unevenly spread across the region. Frequent droughts, often broken by severe flooding, have affected lives, slowed economic growth, and have posed significant challenges for water managers. Intensive use of limited water resources has affected water quality and has impacted on downstream river ecosystems. Climate change promises to further exacerbate these problems.

Tackling these challenges is even more demanding when water crosses borders. In these cases water managers in different countries need to work together to share water and maximise the benefits for all. We need increasingly close cooperation if we are to continue to grow our economies, address poverty and protect the environment. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has lead the way by providing a framework for countries sharing river systems to come together to address these challenges together.