



Issue 1, 2019



Protecting our environment

What is going on about a water pipe from Wakkerstroom to Volksrust?

January 2019, citizen's briefing note

In the middle of 2018, we heard that the Dr Pixley ka Isaka Seme Local Municipality had called for tenders to build a large pipe to carry water from Martin's dam, the water supply for Wakkerstroom and eSizameleni, to Volksrust. They did so without first speaking to affected residents or making an announcement in the local newspaper, as they are required to do. They issued the tender to a company from Mbombela (we still don't know what the name of the company is, or for how much the money). In the opinion of the Wakkerstroom Interest Group, which includes representatives of residents, businesses, and those responsible for the health of the *vlei* that draws visitors to the town, the Dr Pixley ka Isaka Seme Local Municipality has made three large mistakes in issuing this tender, and should not be allowed to build the pipeline until they have fixed them.

First, they have not checked if there is enough water in Martin's dam to supply the needs of eSizameleni and Wakkerstroom, as well as Volksrust and Vukuzakhe. The reports by the government engineers show that there is **not** enough water, by a long way. At most, Martin's dam could supply 1/20th of the needs of Volksrust. There is a much better source which could provide the water they need, and much more cheaply. It is the pipe which already leads from Zaaihoek dam to Vukuzakhe, and then onward to the Majuba Power station. There is plenty of spare water there – why do they not use that before building a new

pipe from Wakkerstroom? The Dr Pixley ka Isaka Seme local authority has not applied to the Department of Water and Sanitation to change the water use license for Martin's dam, which they would need to do in order to extract a larger quantity of water from Martin's dam.

Second, the municipality claims that the proposed pipe is too small to require an environmental impact study. But this is only looking at one, small part of the environmental law. Any action that will reduce the water reaching the Wakkerstroom *vlei*, which is one of the most important wetlands in South Africa, requires an environmental impact assessment. It is unlikely that the permission for this pipeline would be granted by the environmental authorities if a proper study were done.

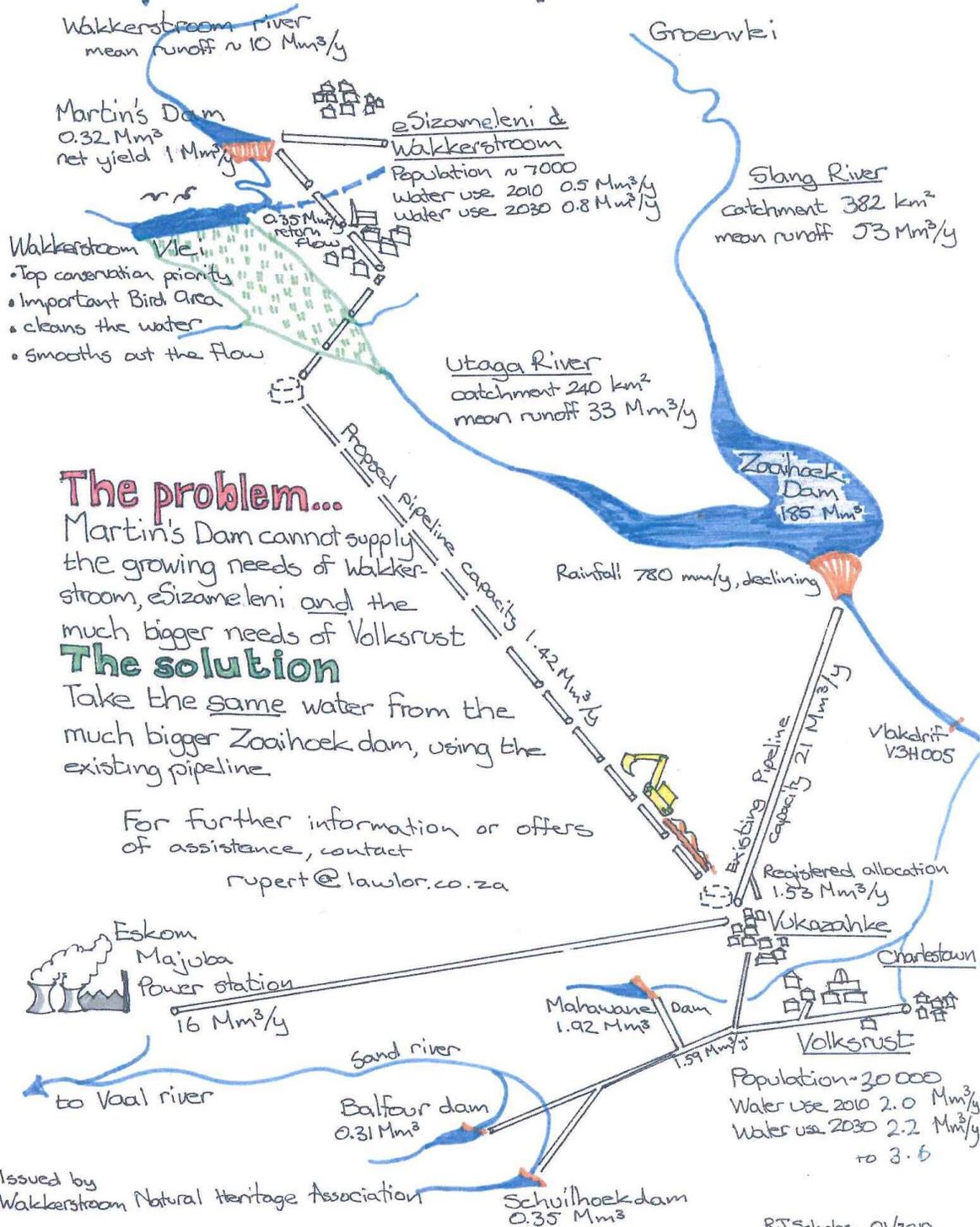
Third, this seems to be a 'fruitless expenditure of public money', which is not allowed by the Accountant General. Apart from not following the law regarding issuing tenders and disregarding the government's own water and conservation studies, the pipeline would cost maybe tens of millions of rand to build, and then more money to operate each year. This would double up on the better pipe which already exists from Zaaihoek. It seems that the local authority does not want to pay the pumping costs from Zaaihoek, so they have asked for money to build a new pipeline instead!

This is not a fight about who gets water from the Utaga river. The people of Vukuzakhe and Volksrust have as much right to clean water as the people of eSizameleni and Wakkerstroom. It is about where that water is taken out of the river.

The experts say that by far the best place to take it from is the Zaaihoek dam, and the worst place would be from Martin's dam.

This briefing note is available in both Zulu and Afrikaans. Please contact Rupert Lawlor on rupert@lawlor.co.za for more details or if you have any queries.

Everything you need to know about the Proposed Water Pipe to Volksrust



The problem...

Martin's Dam cannot supply the growing needs of Wakkerstroom, eSizameleni and the much bigger needs of Volksrust

The solution

Take the same water from the much bigger Zaaihoek dam, using the existing pipeline.

For further information or offers of assistance, contact rupert@lawlor.co.za