

SRK encouraged by new DWS online water use licence system

Jacky Burke, leader of SRK Consulting's Water Use Licence Application (WULA) Group in Johannesburg hosted a workshop last month on the Department of Water and Sanitation's new online system.



SRK's WULA experts

“Water is a complex field and everyone involved is on a steep learning curve with the stringent new licensing system,” said Burke. “But we are confident that by sharing our experiences in workshops like these – and continuing to receive guidance from DWS – we can help clients improve compliance and reduce operational and closure liability costs.”

More streamlined, manageable process

The workshop focused on the new Electronic Water Use Licence Application and Authorisation System (EWULAAS), highlighting the value of making the financial and time investment early in a WUL application so that costs can be saved later. Experts also outlined how applications could benefit from the DWS's more streamlined and manageable process – while also considering where challenges were being experienced.

SRK senior environmental scientist Avril Owens emphasised that the web-based EWULAAS system was user-friendly and followed a logical flow process in three key steps: a first, pre-application phase; a second phase in which supporting documents and water use forms are submitted on-line; and a third phase where a technical report and additional specialist information are uploaded for DWS decision making.

“EWULAAS certainly promises to be a great improvement on the original paper-based system,” said Owens. “Among the advantages is the ability to generate a summary of water uses per farm prior to phase one submission, which provides a check and highlights gaps in the application; also, the submission can be tracked online, providing more transparency on its progress.”

As with any new system, she said, there were going to be teething issues, so SRK maintained close working links with DWS to help ensure that the system worked optimally.

Importance of pre-application phase

“There is no doubt that this is a better way to go – with applicants knowing that all the information is there, that nothing can get lost, and that the process can be tracked,” she said. “There is obviously also a human element to the system and, as users, we also have to play a constructive role in keeping everyone to the deadlines.”

Owens emphasised the importance of the pre-application phase, in which applicants meet with DWS to clarify their way forward; in fact, most of the preparation work is required to be completed before the online submission process can begin.

Highlighting the type and scale of activity to be undertaken, SRK principal environmental scientist Didi Masoabi said it was important for applicants to be aware that site-specific environmental impact assessments and specialist studies may need to be conducted.

“Public participation is also an important element of a WULA, as interested and affected parties need to be informed about what you plan to do and how it may impact them,” said Masoabi. “Depending on the size of your project, the DWS may need more information on how you intend to communicate with the public about your project.”

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