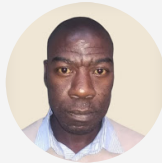


SOUTH AFRICA

'Save the Vaal Environment' welcomes order directing prevention of Vaal river pollution

28 June 2023 - 21:49

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Journalist



CESSPOOL A lake of sewage runs from a broken manhole into the Vaal River. A court order has declared that the discharge of raw or inadequately treated sewage by the Emfuleni municipality into the Vaal River and Rietspruit was in contravention of various legislations and must be prevented.

Image: Maureen Steward

Save the Vaal Environment (Save) has welcomed a court order declaring that the discharge of raw or inadequately treated sewage by the Emfuleni municipality into the Vaal River and Rietspruit was in contravention of various legislations and must be prevented.

The order was made by agreement between Save and the ministers of water and sanitation, finance and environment, the Gauteng premier and MECs of Cogta and finance and the municipality.

It was made an order of the court by Johannesburg high court judge Gregory Wright on Friday.

"This is a big win for Save the Vaal Environment after years of litigation and pressure placed on the authorities," said Malcolm Plant, chairman of Save.

Save is a community-based non-profit organisation that aims to prevent pollution of the Vaal River and its tributaries.

Save said heightened awareness about sewage pollution in the area led to then water and sanitation minister Lindiwe Sisulu taking charge of the Emfuleni waste water system.

The Emfuleni waste water system comprises Leeuwkuil, Rietspruit and Sebokeng treatment plants and each has its own system of pump stations totalling 44 and a network spanning over 1,000km.

The Sebokeng and Rietspruit plants discharge what should be treated effluent into the Rietspruit, while the Leeuwkuil plant discharges into the Vaal River at Vanderbijlpark.

Plant said the terms of the court order highlighted that the discharge of raw or partially treated sewage into the Vaal River was in contravention of the National Water Act and the National Environmental Management Act (Nema).

The order requires the minister of water and sanitation to provide an affidavit within 45 days stating all measures taken to date to deal with the problem. The minister is also required to file an action plan in respect of the intervention, provide a timeframe for its implementation and details of its funding.

The minister of environmental affairs is ordered to provide an affidavit concerning criminal investigations relating to contraventions of the Nema.

The water and sanitation minister is also directed to invite and allow Save and the River Properties and Safety Association to participate at quarterly engagement meetings to update them on progress with the action plan.

These meetings must include persons with technical expertise of the implementation, and the organisations must be given seven days' notice of such meetings.

"We look forward to building a relationship with the relevant authorities because all parties are working towards the same goal of a clean Vaal River within the Emfuleni jurisdiction," Plant said.

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