

History of Albany Coast Water Board (ACWB)

from minutes and memories of Bill Deacon, Denys Wells and Ron Ball

In the late sixties the Bushman's Municipality decided to sink a borehole to provide water to the caravan park and supermarket and any other businesses that required it. This was done, and a small reservoir built on the hill, below the present reservoirs by the contractor, Herkie Venter.

During the mid seventies additional boreholes were sunk in the sand dunes. Bill Deacon was appointed as Town Clerk in 1978 and it was decided to extend the scheme to all the houses in Bushman's and the first reservoir was built on the top of the reserve at Bushman's. This led to a request by the Kenton Council for Bushman's to supply water to the then "emergency transit camp" at Kenton, who were totally reliant on the Kenton residents for water from rainwater tanks.

Mr. Deacon, as an ex MP, went back to Parliament and obtained a grant with the proviso that a Water Board was to be established. A public meeting was held in the Bushman's Town Hall in 1979 and the Albany Coast Water Board was established with Dick Denton, an ex Divisional Council Engineer, as Chairman and Tony Stott as Secretary.

The developers of Merry Hill contributed an additional amount of R110, 000 (1979) on condition that no other developments would take place at Kenton unless an equal contribution was forthcoming from new developers. On the strength of this commitment, new wells were sunk in the dunes at Bushman's and the first reservoir at Kenton was built.

Bushman's was not initially part of the scheme as they felt the price of the water was too high (R0.50 per kilolitre, 1986). The current price is R3.50, 2006. The wells supplying Kenton soon drained the wells supplying Bushman's and as a result Bushman's had to join the scheme.

We have seen that with water a new development soon follows. Each time infrastructure catches up with development, development surges ahead. A motion by Bill Deacon was passed that in future all developers would have to contribute to infrastructure.

The present Water Board offices were opened at a ceremony by the Hon. J W E Wiley MP and Cabinet Minister, in 1982. Simultaneous to the increased development a severe drought was experienced in the mid 1980's. Small holders and farmers on the Grahamstown road also applied for, and received water in 1985.

The increased demand led to a search for new water resources and possible supplies. The search included Harvest Vale, Merville, Orange River, Fish River, Kariega River, Diaz Cross and Cannon Rocks and Wilmot's Farm.

A second 2 megalitre reservoir was built at Kenton in 1990. In 1989 Tony Stott retired and Ron Ball took over the ACWB as CEO and together with Ian Brown developed the Diaz well field as it is now known. The development was completed in 1992 with a R2m loan from ARSC.

History repeated itself and again development exceeded supply. We are unfortunately in a water deficit area of the country and potable ground water is in short supply. On the strength of this acknowledgement Messer's Denton and Ball investigated Reverse Osmosis (RO) and examined plant belonging to the Ciskei Government in 1992.

In 1995 after visiting a fledgling desalination plant at Strandfontein on the West Coast, a brave decision was taken to proceed with reverse osmosis. This resulted in the construction of the RO plant at the ACWB. In 1997, the ACWB became the first plant in South Africa to successfully pioneer R O with sea water.

In 2000, after 20 years Mr. Denton resigned and Mr. F Booi took over as Chairman. In 2004 after 17 years Mr. Ron Ball and Mr. Ian Brown retired. The present ACWB 2006, consists of Mr. F Booi, Chairman, Mrs. C Brink, Vice Chairman, Mr. J Peter, Mr. Wells and Mr. J Smuts.

