



Water streams down the As River where it will be used to generate electricity.

Photo: Anton Louis Olivier

Dihlabeng committing to renewable energy

A small-scale renewable energy project in Bethlehem, in the Free State, is tapping into water to help meet local energy demand – with local government as a guaranteed customer.

STAFF WRITER

South Africa's first independent commercial hydropower project will soon see electricity generated from water and sold to the local Dihlabeng Municipality to supplement the area's electricity supply.

What's made it possible is a long-term purchase agreement between the Bethlehem Hydro project and the municipality.

Over the past few years the project has seen the construction of two hydropower units of 3MW and 4MW on the As River and the Sol Plaatje Dam in the municipal area. The units receive water supplied at high speed from the Lesotho Highlands Water Project.

The initiative will help meet some 20% of local energy needs in Bethlehem. Project Manager Anton Louis Olivier says that while this may seem small, it equates to the electricity required by 11 000 low-income households. By

providing an alternative to coal for electricity generation, the project will reduce the emission of more than 30 000 tons per year of carbon dioxide, one of the most harmful greenhouse gases in terms of global warming.

The project is registered as a Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) project under the Kyoto Protocol, which allows industrialised nations committed to greenhouse gas reduction to purchase carbon credits from sustainable energy projects in developing countries, essentially helping finance these. The sale of carbon credits is expected to contribute 25% of the project's revenue.

The R67 million initial costs were funded with the help of the Development Bank of Southern Africa, the Central Energy Fund and Hydrowsa, an empowerment group largely owned by women.

As is the case with the Darling Wind Farm in the Western Cape, Bethlehem Hydro will generate renewable energy that would not be possible without a firm commitment by local authorities to purchase the energy.

For more information visit www.bethlehemhydro.co.za

BRIGHT IDEA

Discounting traffic fines

Payments for outstanding traffic fines have been streaming in at eThekweni since the municipality gave a 50% discount on all outstanding fines dating as far back as January 2005. The 'limited offer' has seen people queuing up to pay.

Metro police spokesperson Superintendent Joyce Khuzwayo said that 'queues were very long' as 'more and more people are starting to take advantage of this opportunity'. She said the municipality was receiving up to R2 million a day and sometimes more.

By early September about R45 million had come rolling in to the city's coffers, which prompted an extension of the offer to the end of November.

Other municipalities that need to boost their cash flow should consider following suit.



Photo: Katharine McKenzie

Slashing traffic fines by 50% for a limited period in eThekweni has prompted motorists to pay up.