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11 September 2020

UCT to be a net-zero-water campus by 2050

University estimated to save more than R62 million over a period of five years and R21 million annually thereafter

The University of Cape Town (UCT) is committed to sustainable water management with a view of becoming a net-zero-water campus by 2050. The UCT [Sustainable Water Management Strategy](#) is evidence of this commitment and supports UCT's Vision 2030, which has a key focus on sustainability.

Net-zero-water is when the water demand met from municipal supply equals the water demand met from alternative supply options, such as rainwater harvesting, when measured over a period of one year. The strategy was commissioned by the university in response to the transdisciplinary, collaborative and impact-driven research by its Future Water Institute on the implementation of water-sensitive design principles – considering the recent drought that affected Cape Town.

"In 2017 and 2018 we came very close to running out of water. This was a terrifying thought, something we could not have imagined would happen. It shook the city of Cape Town and UCT, but at the same time we learnt a lot more about water and how we can save this very precious resource," said Manfred Braune, UCT's director of environmental sustainability. Braune, who led the development of the strategy, said: "We want our relationship with water to change; we want to treat it as the precious resource that it is and reorganise ourselves and our infrastructure to do so."

The interventions proposed will enable UCT to continue to operate during periods of water scarcity and will build capacity to withstand future droughts that are likely to occur in the province. The strategy was developed with the assistance of Zutari (formerly Aurecon), a consulting engineering firm with years of experience in water-related engineering and projects. The strategy was recently presented to numerous university stakeholders and remains open for input from the campus community.

Its primary objectives are to:

- Reduce UCT's overall demand and dependence on municipal water supply and waste-water treatment

- Maintain business continuity during periods of unprecedented low rainfall and water restrictions
- reduce the overall spend on water through appropriate investments
- provide a diverse, resilient and sustainable combination of water resources
- mitigate UCT's overall impact of run-off on downstream water quality.

This strategy, centred around five core commitments, also answers the City of Cape Town's call for all individuals to be custodians of water as a finite resource. The first commitment, to "Know our water" is the foundation of the strategy and involves measuring water thereby consolidating infrastructure records and installing additional smart water meters to obtain an improved understanding of water use across UCT.

UCT commits to inform, empower and educate the campus community to better utilise water as a finite and vulnerable resource, essential to sustain life, development and the environment. A key component of this commitment will be the [development of UCT as a living lab](#). This will involve the latest thinking and hands-on research in support of implementing concepts like sustainable drainage systems, which will be demonstrated through live capital projects on campus.

Steps towards the plan's realisation have been advanced through R70 million in funding received from the Department of Higher Education, Science and Innovation and an additional R10 million from the university. The department funding is targeted particularly at the implementation of water-saving projects in student housing facilities where water consumption is the highest.

The estimated committed annual investment in implementing water-saving measures will be R70 million for the next five years and will result in total estimated direct savings of more than R62 million over this period and R21 million annually thereafter. After five years the strategy and implementation plan will be reviewed and adapted where needed. Thereafter, it will be a living document that will be reviewed and updated regularly.

The Future Water Institute's interim director, Dr Kirsty Carden, said that they were committed to supporting the roll-out of the strategy. "We acknowledge the need for a sustainable water management approach on campus – not only in terms of building resilience to future water-related risks at UCT, but also as an integral learning opportunity that will allow research and teaching to come alive through real projects that are cutting edge.

"We will remain very involved in the roll-out of the strategy and will take a keen role in participating in the Water Working Group that will have oversight to ensure that the strategy is implemented."

ENDS

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