

SUBMISSION BY NGO AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN SUPPORT OF DR. ANTHONY TURTON

Reference is hereby made to the CSIR Report No. CSIR/NRE/WR/EXP/2008/0160/A entitled, “Three Strategic Water Quality Challenges that Decision-Makers Need to Know About and How the CSIR Should Respond”, which was intended to be delivered as the Keynote Address at “A Clean South Africa” CSIR “Science Real and Relevant” Conference on the 18 November 2008, by Dr. Anthony Turton, a Natural Resource and Environment Unit Fellow.

We furthermore refer to the front page of the Cape Times, dated the 20th of November, 2008, and Beeld, dated the 21st November, 2008 which featured the suppression of Dr. Turton’s key note address.

Pursuant to the suppression of the said Report, we, as representatives of NGOs and Civil Society respond as follows:

Up to the present, scientists have only interpreted the state of our water resources and environment in South Africa, **it is also necessary to change it**. If our scientists use their knowledge to concoct ingenious excuses to defend the poor management of our scarce water resources and colonial exploitation of historically disadvantaged communities, science will fail to address mankind’s common needs, namely the need to an environment that is not harmful to health and well-being, and sufficient water. By analogous reasoning: If scientists devote their ingenuity to making or condoning toxic and radioactive dust fallout to suffocate the inhabitants of great cities or consent to spread toxic and radioactive heavy metals to infect the reservoirs and stock of populations, the survivors of our civilization will declare that our science has exacted too high a price for its benefits. Similarly, if scientific organisations condone the pollution of our scarce water resources, science and civilization will, if not perish together, suffer a heavy setback for many years to come.

We are of the firm opinion that Dr. Turton’s key note address was intended for the large and growing number of concerned members of civil society who realize that the impact of science on society is now the focus of genuinely constructive social effort to change the management of our scarce water resources. It is also believed that Dr. Turton’s paper was intended for large and growing number of adolescents, who realize that they will be the first victims of our loss of dilution capacity caused by the over-allocation of national water resources, our unique pattern of spatial development, and our historic legacy of non-internalised externalities.

In the Victorian age big men of science like Faraday, T.H. Huxley, and Tyndall did not think it beneath their dignity to write about simple truths with the conviction that they could instruct their audiences. There were giants in those days. The key to the eloquent paper which the pen of Dr. Anthony Turton produced is his firm faith in the educability of the ordinary man in the street and that science ought to be applied in the service of society. The value of his paper, entitled “Three Strategic Water Quality Challenges that Decision-Makers Need to Know About and How the CSIR Should Respond”, has been ill-conceived by certain members of the CSIR who have scarcely begun to see how science might be used for the satisfaction of human needs. We, however, as representatives of NGOs and civil society groups hail Dr. Anthony Turton as a present day giant.

Dr. Anthony Turton has always acted with integrity. We have knowledge that he belongs to the Pugwash Movement, created by Albert Einstein and Bertrand Russell, to act as the moral conscience of all scientists. That is an invitation-only organization

It is publicly known that Dr. Turton has laboured hard and long for the noble and laudable objective, namely science in the service of society. The vilification of a person with such a vision and mission is highly censurable and lamentable.