Building 4, Boskruin Village Office Park
Cnr President Fouche & Hawken Road
Bromhof, 2188
Tel: 087 170 0639
Email: info@watercan.org.za

18 July 2025

Mr Ntshaveni Mukwevho
Managing Director
Joburg Water
Turbine Hall
65 Ntemi Piliso Street
Newtown
Johannesburg

Via Email: Ntshavheni Mukwevho ntshavheni.mukwevho@jwater.co.za

CC:
Ms Anet Muir
Chief Director: Water Use Compliance, Monitoring and Enforcement
Department of Water and Sanitation
173 Francis Baard Street
Pretoria
0001

Via Email: Muir Anet (DHQ) MuirA@dws.gov.za

RE: Joburg Water Fails to Meet Critical Microbiological Standards

Dear Mr Mukwevho,

I hope this letter finds you well.

We write to express WaterCAN's deep concern regarding the quality of potable water in the City of Johannesburg, and the broader implications this has for public health and safety.

Recent public commentary by water scientist Ms Ayesha Laher has drawn attention to the Gauteng Province's microbiological compliance rate of only 97.8%. According to her analysis, only three municipalities—Ekurhuleni, Lesedi, and Merafong—currently meet the required standards for safe drinking water. This is alarming and warrants immediate attention.

Ms Laher further referenced the recently gazetted *Revised Compulsory National Water and Sanitation Services Standards*, which state:

"A Water Services Institution must, within 12 hours of the confirmation of an incident that poses a health risk, inform the Department's relevant regional office and the relevant Provincial Department of Health's District Health Office of the health risk."

Moreover, an advisory notice **must** be issued when:

- An incident has been declared based on repeated non-compliant results indicating a health risk.
- The Water Services Authority believes the water quality is compromised or likely to fail SANS 241 health risk criteria.

WaterCAN's review of Joburg Water's own monthly reports (see Annex A) for March, April, and May 2025 raises serious questions:

- **Turbidity (SANS 241 Table 2):** The operational limit is <1 NTU. In May 2025, Joburg Water's compliance was only 87.4%, falling far below the minimum threshold of 95%. Elevated turbidity levels can hinder effective disinfection and compromise water safety.
- **Microbiological Compliance – E. coli (SANS 241 Table 1 & 4):** The national standard requires 99% compliance as E. coli is an acute health risk. In March and April 2025, Joburg Water's results were 98.9% and 98.1% respectively—both below the acceptable limit. Given the scale of Johannesburg's population, SANS 241 stipulates that microbiological compliance should be excellent, i.e., above 99%.

In light of these issues, WaterCAN urgently requests the following information from Joburg Water:

1. Has Joburg Water identified whether these failures are isolated or part of a recurring pattern?
2. What concrete steps are being taken to address and rectify these lapses in compliance?
3. Why is the overall microbiological compliance below 99%, and what is being done to reach the required standard?

The Department of Water and Sanitation's 2024 Blue Drop Report flagged widespread concerns around water quality nationally. We thus also call on the Department of Water and Sanitation to fulfil its oversight mandate. The Department of Water and Sanitation must:

1. **Make Water Risk Information Public Immediately**
   When the Department of Water and Sanitation receives incident reports via the IRIS system, it must make this information public without delay—through press releases, advisories, or public alerts. Communities have a right to know when their water is unsafe, especially when municiplaities are not communicating these results.

2. **Deploy National Intervention Teams to Failing Municipalities**
   The Department must urgently send national support teams—including engineers, health officials, and compliance experts—to municipalities with repeated non-compliance. Monitoring and legal action alone is not enough—Government must step in to fix broken infrastructure and protect public health now.

WaterCAN calls on Joburg Water and the Department of Water and Sanitation to take urgent action to address non-compliance, communicate openly with the public, and issue appropriate health advisories as required. We remain committed to working collaboratively to protect water quality and ensure public health. South Africans deserve better than contaminated water and silence—this issue cannot wait.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Ferrial Adam
Executive Director
WaterCAN

Annex A: Joburg Water results for March, April and May 2025

MONTH : March 2025 to 2025/03/31

Determinand	Units	Limit	Compliance Target %	Compliance Achieved %	Number of tests	Number Non-Compliant
Microbiological Determinands						
E.coli	MPN/100mL	0	99.0	98.9	566	6
Heterotrophic plate count average	Ave CFU/mL	≤1 000.00	95	99.4	542	3
Total coliforms	MPN/100mL	≤10.00	95	96.1	566	22
Chemical & Physical Properties						
Colour	HZ	≤15	95	96.6	59	2
Conductivity at 25ºC	mS/m	≤150	95	100.0	31	0
Odour	-	Not Detected	95	100.0	33	0
pH at 25ºC	-	5.0-9.5	95	99.8	566	1
Taste	-	Not Detected	95	100.0	33	0
Turbidity	NTU	≤1	95	95.8	360	15

MONTH : April 2025 to 2025/04/30

Determinand	Units	Limit	Compliance Target %	Compliance Achieved %	Number of tests	Number Non-Compliant
Microbiological Determinands						
E.coli	MPN/100mL	0	99.0	98.1	576	11
Heterotrophic plate count average	Ave CFU/mL	≤1 000.00	95	98.2	570	10
Total coliforms	MPN/100mL	≤10.00	95	95.7	576	25
Chemical & Physical Properties						
Conductivity at 25ºC	mS/m	≤150	95	100.0	28	0
Odour	-	Not Detected	95	100.0	42	0
pH at 25ºC		5.0-9.5	95	100.0	576	0
Taste	-	Not Detected	95	100.0	42	0
Turbidity	NTU	≤1	95	95.9	370	15

MONTH : May 2025 to 2025/05/31

Determinand	Units	Limit	Compliance Target %	Compliance Achieved %	Number of tests	Number Non-Compliant
Microbiological Determinands						
Coliphage (retic)	PFP/ml	≤0.00	95	100.0	19	0
E.coli	MPN/100mL	0	99.0	99.0	586	6
Heterotrophic plate count average	Ave CFU/mL	≤1 000.00	95	99.5	586	3
Total coliforms	MPN/100mL	≤10.00	95	97.4	586	15
Chemical & Physical Properties						
Colour	HZ	≤15	95	93.4	182	12
Conductivity at 25ºC	mS/m	≤150	95	100.0	28	0
Odour	-	Not Detected	95	100.0	24	0
pH at 25ºC	-	5.0-9.5	95	100.0	586	0
Taste	-	Not Detected	95	100.0	24	0
Turbidity	NTU	≤1	95	87.4	508	64