



**A truck carries water from parliament's subterranean reservoir.** Picture: Thabo Mokone

# Parliament's precious water snatched from under its feet

By **THABO MOKONE**

● A government contractor has been caught allegedly stealing huge amounts of water from parliament's reservoir and selling it to drought-hit Capetonians.

Parliamentary officials said they caught employees of the company – hired by the Department of Public Works to do high-pressure cleaning of pavements, bins and walls – helping themselves to thousands of litres.

The employees had been seen driving in and out of parliament in a truck loaded with huge industrial water tanks, they said, and it was assumed the company was bringing in “grey” water for its operations.

An investigation began after parliament's water consumption spiked, and officials found the company was pumping water from the underground reservoir onto its truck, then selling it for about R3 000 a tank to householders.

When confronted, the alleged thieves first claimed to be transporting unpurified water to clean other government buildings, then said they were taking it to Genadendal, the

official Cape Town residence of the president, which uses boreholes as back-up.

Parliament's spokesman, Moloto Mothapo, said a preliminary investigation had found that water has been taken with no permission sought from the acting secretary to parliament, Baby Tyawa.

“The official report that parliament has received from the Department of Public Works is that the potable water is being taken from parliament to use for cleaning services at several state buildings,” he said.

“The department has acknowledged and apologised that no permission was sought from the secretary to parliament, which is highly irregular. This has been ordered to stop . . . The presiding officers have learned of this with concern and have asked for a full report.”

Public works spokesman Thami Mchunu said the contractor tapped into the reservoir without permission. “The department acknowledges that it did not discuss this matter with parliament and obtain their consent in advance. An apology was issued to parliament and the service provider was instructed to stop with immediate effect.”