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THE Department of Engineering at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) in collaboration with the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) recently launched the DPWI Water Research Chair at the Professor Bonginkosi Blade Nzimande Engineering Building, at the Richards Bay Campus.

The launch marked the beginning of a strategic partnership aimed at advancing research, innovation and capacity building in the water sector. Through the establishment of the DPWI Water Research Chair, the partnership seeks to address pressing water-related challenges, promote sustainable water resource management and contribute to the development of skilled professionals and research that will be beneficial to communities across South Africa.

Internal and external University stakeholders, government representatives, academics, industry partners and students were present to witness the momentous occasion.

In her opening address, UNIZULU Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Nokuthula Kunene extended her appreciation to DPWI for the confidence they had placed in the University since 2024. "Your investment is not only in UNIZULU, but also in future engineers, researchers and innovators who will help shape South Africa," she said.

Prof Kunene further stated that as South Africa faces increased pressure

arising from climate change, aging infrastructure, rapid urbanisation, water losses, pollution of rivers and catchments, and growing demand for reliable water services, addressing these challenges required more than infrastructure investment alone. It requires research.

She added that the Water Research Chair places UNIZULU in a position to contribute towards meaningful scientific knowledge that supports national infrastructure planning, sustainable water management and the development of resilient communities.

"We accept this responsibility with humility, determination and a commitment to excellence. May this Water Research Chair become a catalyst for innovation, scientific excellence, a platform for developing future engineering leaders and a lasting contribution to South Africa's development agenda," she concluded.

Highlighting the potential practical impact of the initiative, DPWI Facilities Manager, Sbusiso Dlamini said the Water Research Chair will assist the department in tackling non-compliance of water care facilities and developing mandatory water demand management and improvements in the Blue Drop programme. This is an incentive and risk-based regulation programme introduced by the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) to assess, certify and improve the quality and safety of drinking water across South Africa.



University stakeholders, government representatives, academics, industry partners and students attended the momentous launch. | Samkele Sokhela