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End to water cuts? Not in our village!

By Evie Andreou

RESIDENTS of a mountain village near Limassol have greeted with wry disbelief President Nicos Anastasiades' comments this week that water shortages were a thing of the past.

As he made those comments at the official opening of the island's sixth desalination plant at Vassiliko on Monday evening, the residents of Pano Lania – a village at the foot of the Troodos Mountains – were in the midst of a six-day water cut with the likelihood of many more to come.



“The disruption of water supply is now an outdated phenomenon in the history of Cyprus,” the president said, echoing his agriculture minister's pledge earlier in the year that the public would not experience any water cuts in 2014 despite Cyprus experiencing the least rainfall since records began in 1901. A mere 204 millimetres of rainfall was recorded for the 2013-14 season.

There are scores of villages across Cyprus which, like Pano Lania, are not connected to the Water Development Department's main distribution system and rely solely on rainfall to fill up reservoirs, underground springs and boreholes to meet their water needs. For villages like this, the 60,000 cubic metres of water desalination plants like Vassiliko can produce a day is of little help.

Diane Sims, Pano Lania resident for eight years, said that water shortages have always been an issue in the summer but six days without water was too much.

“The water is back on now, but what about the future?” she asked, describing how the village's population increases in the summer.

“Now, the children are on holiday, and people start to come up to the village in the hot weather, where will that leave us, as they hose down their patios, and more water is consumed by the village?”

Lania's mukhtar Yiannis Akamas said that Lania gets its water from the Arkolahania project, an underground spring that provides water to 28 villages in the area.

“Other villages however, supplement their water supply with bore holes, but there is not enough water in Lania to drill our own, so we rely solely on Arkolahania and on help from our neighbouring villages that at times offer us their excess water, like Trimiklini,” he said.

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Water allocation is calculated according to the population of each community and is distributed by the District Offices to the water tanks of each local community, after which the mukhtar is responsible for distribution to households.

Akamas said that poor rainfall had caused the level of Arkolahania spring to drop by 35-40 per cent while Lania's water allocation has been cut from 123-130 cubic metres a day to 90-100 cubic metres. He explained that water allocation is proving very stressful for him and his assistant since they have to check how much water the community receives every day and then calculate how to distribute water equally.

"It is our fault for wanting to live in a village instead of living in urban areas," he said.

In his 21 years of being responsible for water allocation in the Troodos area, Demetris Alayiotou, an officer at the communications and works ministry, said that this year had been the worst.

His concerns were echoed by Nicos Neokleous, senior officer at the Water Development Department who said that this year there is not sufficient water in the aquifers, and communities that rely only on bore holes and reservoirs would have serious problems, especially in August.

"The department is trying to relieve such communities with re-enforcement projects, such as extra bore holes," he said.

Some areas in Limassol have already been connected to the town's water distribution system, but funds had run out to connect any more communities, he added.

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