



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**Embargo:** Immediate

**DATE:** 14 August 2017

### **Act of God ruled out in #KnysnaFires**

The Knysna Municipal Fire Chief, Clinton , Manager, Kam Chetty and Executive Mayor, Eleanore Bouw-Spies presented the cause of the devastating fires that spread through the area on 7 June to various members of the media today, 14 August.

Manuel presented the vast scientific evidence to the media and saying: “Looking at the evidence scientifically, evidence points to the origin of the fire as being on a clearing site in Elandskraal. Specific patterns of the burn scars on a farm, shows a definite V pattern that indicates with a high degree of certainty the site where the fire started. Just below this scar we have found evidence of man-made fire.

“Evidence further shows that it is this fire that spread due to the weather patterns of 7 June. I can confirm that the cause of the fire being an Act of God is dispelled. We cannot say that this fire was started as a criminal act of arson, in other words deliberately, this investigation and conclusion is up to the South African Police Services.”

Before the start of the presentation the mayor thanked the nation for their continued support of Greater Knysna and for keeping its residents in their thoughts and prayers.

“Following the fires we needed to decide whether we recreate what was there before or if we do things completely differently. We have chosen to respond to the disaster by finding innovative ways of becoming a disaster-wise community.

“Some of the biggest culprits for the intensity of the fire were Invasive Plant Material. The Knysna Municipality plans to use that exact material to build labour intensive, cost effective fire resistant housing,” said the mayor.

She added that the fire has left the area with bare slopes that are extremely susceptible to erosion. “We’ve acquired erosion control materials that are made from the fibres of invasive plants and already these geo-textiles are being installed by municipal staff in the erosion hot spots,” she said.

According to Chetty the Western Cape Premier, Helen Zille’s office has set up the Garden Route Rebuild Initiative to support the rebuilding of the region. Preliminary estimates, to address the infrastructure of disaster damage totals R496.3 million for the entire region.

Cost estimates for Knysna alone is:

Health – R 1, 256 million  
Agriculture – R40 million  
Human Settlements – R44,920 million  
Local Government – R91 573 175  
Environmental affairs – R134.89 million

“Much of this funding must still be raised and applications are being made to various government departments for assistance,” explained Chetty.

Chetty applauded Manuel for his very comprehensive report as well as the time in which the report has been compiled. “I know that the Portuguese Fires that started just days after the Greater Knysna Fires has yet to be completed and for this I must thank our Fire Chief.”

He further said that Manuel had been attending fires investigations since 1993. “During this time he was tasked with finding the cause and the origin of fires such as the large Cape Town Fires in Camps Bay, Strandfontein, Lakeside and the Southern Peninsula fires.

“This report presented today included evidence and opinions of the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and several other scientists and I must say that I am extremely impressed with their methodology,” concluded

The Fire Chief’s scientific and technical presentation, presented to the media earlier today will be uploaded onto the Knysna Municipal Website by close of day today.

**ENDS**

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**CAPTION**

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