PRESS RELEASE

Knysna Municipality
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IMPLEMENTATION OF KNYSNA ESTUARY POLLUTION ACTION PLAN GOING WELL

The implementation of the Knysna Estuary Pollution Action Plan is well underway and is starting to show positive results.

Knysna Municipal Manager Lauren Waring, who is also the chairperson of the Knysna Estuary Pollution Control Task Committee, said several projects within the Plan were completed while on-going programmes were starting to prove successful in reducing contamination into lagoon.

"The Action Plan addressed three main sources of pollution into the estuary: the sewer network including the Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW), polluted river systems that run through informal settlements into the estuary, and the stormwater network which has illegal connections to the sewer network. Specific projects have been tied to each of the three causes.

"The long-awaited upgrade of the Knysna Waste Water Treatment Works (WWTW) is nearing completion. The first phase, which included the installation of superior mechanical and electrical equipment, is very near completion and is already delivering excellent results. We have taken several stakeholders on inspections of the treatment works the past week and have only had positive feedback. The second phase, which includes sludge dewatering equipment, is expected to be completed in May (2013) at which time the plant will meet operating standards in terms of the National Water Act. Also on the Integrated Development Programme (IDP) budget for the future is the extension of the works to ensure capacity for anticipated future growth," said Waring.

Other sewer-related projects completed include the upgrade of three critical pump stations and removal of sludge in the eastern wetland at George Rex Drive. A call for proposals for the removal of fat from fat traps is currently in process.

Local estuary expert, Professor Brian Allanson, attended a WWTW site inspection last week and said that as a water scientist he was greatly impressed by the quality of the effluent that now left the treatment works. "The current Knysna Municipality has done more towards protecting the Knysna lagoon than any other in recent history. Their continued efforts amid tremendous odds are commendable," said Prof Allanson.

SanParks Area Manager for Knysna, Mr Andre Riley said the situation at the WWTW has experienced a complete turn-around from an unreliable, high contamination risk in August 2011 to producing probably the cleanest effluent ever to leave the sewer works. "I commend the efforts of the Knysna Municipality, especially Deputy Town Engineer Water and Sewer, Mr Rhoydon Parry, and his team at the plant for seeing this project through," said Riley.

Eden District Municipality Assistant Head Health Services for Knysna, Mr James McCarthy, said that the cooperative approach between different government departments and agencies has enabled improved methods of caring for the estuary. However, a change in mindset and actions of every person who works, lives and plays in Knysna is required to ensure that government does not just continue to clean up after everyone. "It is time that people start taking responsibility for their waste and discard of it responsibly, and for individuals to hold each other accountable for what goes into the lagoon. We are currently doing surveys among communities living in the river catchment areas to determine their approach towards waste disposal, and hope to gain insight into solutions in this regard," said McCarthy.

The town's River Health Programme is starting to show tangible results as especially river clean-ups are reducing the concentration of pollution that flows into the estuary. The Programme - which enjoys support and funding from the national Department of Environmental Affairs, South African National Parks and Eden District Municipality - concentrates its efforts on the river catchment areas of the Khayalethu, Bongani and Bigai Rivers. This programme also incorporates environmental education, provision of proper waste disposal facilities and improved weekly waste collection to reduce dumping of waste into rivers.

Installation of communal flushing toilets in informal areas are being completed and a gravity outfall sewer is currently being laid through Nekkies, Dam-se-Bos and Hlalani to reduce the use of 'long drop'-toilets, which are major contributors to underground river contamination.

Ms Waring said regular water samples have been taken in the rivers since the beginning of the programme and were already showing improvement. "We consider the cleaning of rivers as essential to the health of the estuary and an ongoing project, which we hope to sustain with the financial assistance of the national Department of Environmental Affairs."

The establishment of floating wetlands in river systems will be going on tender shortly.

The major stormwater-related project, in which a property-to-property inspection of all stormwater and sewerage lines will be made to identify and map illegal connections, will commence shortly. Owners will ultimately be held responsible for the illegal connections that cause overflows of the sewerage system.

"There are still many projects the municipality has in its five-year plan and we continue to seek funding from a wide range of sources to address especially infrastructure issues. The municipality remains confident that the necessary funds for all its projects will be sourced from the wide range of departments and agencies that have a vested interest in the preservation of one of the town, region and country's most important resources: the Knysna lagoon," said Ms Waring.

It should be noted that the swimming beaches and channels in the estuary are safe for recreational purposes. Water samples are taken monthly at 13 points throughout the estuary and the subsequent results published on the Knysna Municipality website at www.knysna.gov.za

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