



## MEDIA RELEASE

**Monday 10 October 2016**  
EMBARGO: Immediate

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### **Ashmead Channel Water safe again**

The Knysna Municipality is greatly concerned about the recent spike of *E.Coli* in the Ashmead Channel.

On hearing the report given by James McCarthy from the Knysna Pollution Task Team in which the Ashmead Channel's water sample reportedly showed *E.Coli* levels above 30 000 E. Coli/100ml. At that stage the Municipality was struggling to unblock the Khayaletu Outfall Sewer and the Knysna Municipality immediately started to put emergency measures into place.

According to Acting Knysna Municipal Manager, Carl Mattheus, "The nature of the bacteriological pollution points to raw sewage flowing into storm water and drainage channels, natural streams with solid waste and deposits of human and animal faeces being other possible contributors," said Mattheus. "In addition the Bongani River/stream has also shown excessive high levels of *E.Coli* that gets deposited directly into the estuary"

To assist in controlling the *E.Coli* levels, the Technical Services department stresses that members of the public must be vigilant about depositing material into the sewage lines that end up blocking these lines.

Mattheus added that after heavy rains and the equinox, another major source that causes *E.Coli* to enter the estuary is the Waste Water Treatment Works. This system deals with a great deal of illegal storm water intrusion into the system.

The Knysna Technical Services department is committed to adding a further screening system within the WwTW to prevent the major blockages taking place in future.

While the Knysna Municipality is confident that these measures will immediately reduce the *E.Coli* significantly, it is never-the-less ensuring that signage, warning the public not to use the channel for recreational purposes is being erected and the public are being warned about the dangers via various social media networks.

"In 2011 – 2012 the Knysna Municipal Council approved funding totalling R44 million to upgrade the Waste Water Treatment Works which is now beyond its operating capacity of 8mg/l per day," Mattheus said. "This upgrade will be completed in two phases. Now that the first phase has been completed, phase two will start. This phase will continue within this financial year and will

continue into the next 2017/2018 financial year. This phase two upgrade will create extra capacity within the WwTW," said Mattheus.

"During 2012 a study was commissioned to investigate the prevalence of storm water entering the sewage lines. A number of homes and businesses were found to have been non-compliant and have since been fined and made to rectify the anomalies," said Mattheus before adding: "This programme will be extended to include all Greater Knysna suburbs. We will ensure that a follow up media statement will be published to inform the residents of how they can avoid being non-compliant and what the by-law states."

Since 2010 several measures have been put into place to alleviate the burden on the Knysna estuary. One example of what has been done is that two hundred water borne toilets were installed in the informal communities within the catchment area to replace the pit latrines that were situated mainly adjacent to the Bongani stream.

During June the Technical Services department had a Bio-remediator installed at the WwTW to enhance the effluent quality leaving the plant.

Chlorination of the rivers and streams started on 5 October and will continue on a weekly basis well into January 2017. This will be accompanied by the monitoring of free chlorine in the system."

Mattheus assures residents that the accompanying strong smell of rotten egg, present around the bottom end of Vigilance Drive, is due to gasses released from WwTW mobilised sludge, and not due to raw sewerage.

"Over the past weekends our Technical Department carted sludge from the WwTW off site and staff sprayed odour control solution on the maturation pond and existing compost heaps," he said

While the serious problem of the elevated *E.Coli* count in the Ashmead channel is being addressed Mattheus once again asked that the public not utilise the Ashmead Channel for any recreational activities.

"In the meantime we continue to monitor the situation along with our partners, the Eden District Municipality Department: Environmental Health and SANParks. Rest assured that not only are we doing what we can to lower the *E.Coli* levels within the estuary - we are working hard to find ways to prevent this pollution at the source."

**ENDS**

**Knysna Municipality Communications Department**  
P O Box 21. Knysna. 6570. Western Cape. South Africa  
Tel +27 (0)44 302 6300 (switchboard) or 302 6471 (direct)  
Fax +27 (0)86 215 4818 e-mail [communications@knysna.gov.za](mailto:communications@knysna.gov.za)