

PRESS RELEASE

For immediate release

07 August 2017

Garden Route Rebuild continues with positive momentum

The GRR has gained momentum, with considerable work happening in the workstreams dedicated to addressing the issues of reconstruction, environmental management, humanitarian assistance, skills development, business support, and infrastructure rehabilitation.

The following was achieved the following in the last two weeks:

- In addition to the 45 Working on Fire (WoF) personnel who have been working on reducing the fire risk in the area, an additional 90 WoF personnel have been deployed to stabilise slopes that are vulnerable to mudslides. Another 45 people will be recruited from the Knysna area to assist with “hydro-sealing”, which is when fertiliser and seeds are sprayed onto burnt ground.
- 388 people were provided with a wide range of government services on 26-27 July in Knysna, including assistance with obtaining IDs and birth certificates from Home Affairs, social assistance from the Department of Social Development, and assistance with grant applications to SASSA.
- All destroyed properties that have asbestos have been identified, and Knysna has provided a list of accredited asbestos removal companies. The process of obtaining demolition certificates will include a requirement that owners of asbestos-identified properties must demonstrate that the asbestos is safely removed.
 - o Note: Illegal dumping is a concern in both Bitou and Knysna municipal areas. Members of the public are urged to report illegal dumping in Knysna on 081 556 9374, and in Bitou on 0861 24 8686.
- Owing to the high cost of asbestos removal, an application for emergency funding this has been submitted to the National Disaster Management Centre. An emergency funding application for fire reduction and erosion mitigation has also been submitted.

- In the coming weeks, a more comprehensive application for disaster funding will be submitted, and this will encompass all the public infrastructure that has been damaged.
- A GIS database has been created which identifies owners of private land who need to reduce their fire risk, and this will form the basis for engagement with these owners.
- The National Disaster Management Centre has classified this disaster as a provincial fire disaster. Province will therefore gazette the declaration of a provincial fire disaster in the near future. This means that more resources will become available to assist in the rebuilding process, and procurement processes can be fast-tracked.
- Both Knysna and Bitou Municipalities have indicated that they will waive building-related fees for owners of destroyed properties, and properties are in the process of being re-valued as vacant plots (which will result in lower property rates bills).
- A physical verification of destroyed businesses in Knysna is 98% complete, and an audit of available business space for affected businesses has commenced in Knysna.

The following will take place in the next two weeks:

- Knysna and Bitou will finalise the requirements for the submission of building plans. They are considering how best to deal with the building regulations that were introduced in 2011; if these new regulations were strictly applied, it could require extensive re-design of previous building plans and lengthen the approvals process. Both Municipalities are committed to making the rebuilding process as smooth and inexpensive as possible, while at the same time adhering to the principle of “building back better”.
- The Department of Social Development will complete an assessment of the needs of the 2,000 households who were affected by the fire by contacting each household.
- A list of Frequently Asked Questions on access to social services and on building plan processes will be made available to the public.
- Knysna Municipality will facilitate a meeting between the Department of Labour and businesses who have or will soon retrench workers. This is to explain the Training Layoff Scheme, which can provide training and financial support to workers who may be temporarily retrenched.

ENDS