

## Garden Route Rebuild initiative making headway

21 July 2017

Western Cape Government, Minister of Economic Opportunities Alan Winde, Minister of Transport & Public Works Donald Grant, and the Mayors of Eden District, Knysna, and Bitou Municipalities met yesterday for a progress meeting on the Garden Route Rebuild (GRR) initiative. The GRR was launched by Western Cape Government Premier Helen Zille to coordinate all the public and private efforts to rebuild the Garden Route after the devastating fires of early June 2017.

There are various areas of work that are being coordinated by the GRR initiative:

- **Reconstruction:** the details and needs of the people affected by the fires are being verified, fast-track building approval processes are being developed in both Bitou and Knysna, and consultations will be held to develop housing solutions that respond to people's needs.
- **Humanitarian relief:** further trauma counselling services and psycho-social support will be made available and further relief will be distributed to those who still require it (e.g. water, clothes, etc). On 26 and 27 July a Thusong Mobile will be stationed in the Knysna Town Hall. These mobiles bring government services – such as Home Affairs, Department of Labour, and SASSA – under one roof, providing a “one-stop shop” for residents needing to reapply for important documents and receive grant support. The Mobile will then move to Bitou Municipality on 28 July. Further “one-stop shop” services will be provided in Knysna in the coming weeks, which will also include planning services support to those rebuilding their homes.
- **Infrastructure rehabilitation:** a significant amount of public infrastructure has been damaged, and preliminary assessments have already been compiled. These will form the basis of applications to the National Disaster Management Centre for funding.
- **Environmental management:** the key challenges are the stability of burned slopes which create a risk of mudslides, the re-growth of alien vegetation, and the continuing fire risk of people living next to wildlands. The GRR has worked with Working on Fire (WoF) to deploy 45 personnel who started work today on creating a fire buffer zone in the Knysna area. In the next two weeks, further WoF teams will be stabilising high-risk slopes. Fire risk mitigation interventions will also take place between Riversdale and Nature's Valley.

- **Skills development:** a task team of public and private training providers is meeting tomorrow to design and roll out short-term courses for construction skills, and longer-term courses to address the other skills needs in the area.

The GRR Initiative is committed to “building back better” - our homes and communities must be resilient to climate change and disasters and should reflect the principle of sustainability.

The Initiative is working closely with relevant provincial and national departments, such as the national Department of Environmental Affairs. In addition, each of the work streams will be inviting non-governmental organisations and experts to add their skills and resources to their efforts. It is only by combining the talents and dedication of everyone in the Garden Route that our challenges can be overcome.

Last week Minister Winde and the Mayors stated that Eden District had received R995,000 in donations, Knysna R3.3 million, and Bitou R272,000. The majority of the donations have been given to Non-Governmental Organisations, and it is critical that these NGOs contact the Initiative to develop a joint, coordinated framework for the use of the donations which will ensure no duplication, and the most efficient use of the funds. The mayors of the region are committed to working with the GRR in respect of funds received by their administrations. The Initiative therefore calls for NGOs and private organisations that received public donations to join forces with the GRR to plan and implement projects together. Organisations can send their details to [Cabral.Wicht@westerncape.gov.za](mailto:Cabral.Wicht@westerncape.gov.za)

ENDS

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