



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Karatara, Farleigh and Rheenendal fires contained**

The devastating bush fire that caused extensive damage to both Farleigh and Karatara on 29 October followed the same path of the tragic 7 June, 2017 fires.

According to Knysna Municipal Disaster Manager, Richard Meyer the fire that spread from the George area jumped from Farleigh across to Bosdorp, Karatara killing nine residents and destroying three structures in its path.

“We had, and still have, all resources from Knysna Fire Department, PG Bison, SANParks, MTO, Working on Fire (WOF) and many volunteers assisting in fighting this fire from all sides,” said Meyer and added: “We are grateful to the farming community for the use of their firefighting equipment which augmented the firefighting effort.”

He explained that as this fire started in the Garden Route District Municipality jurisdiction, a centralised Joint Operations Command Centre (JOC) was already set up in George. Once the fire crossed into Greater Knysna a branch of the George JOC was set up in Karatara. “This forward control point is headed by our Knysna Fire Chief, Wayne Sternsdorf where he, with the assistance from SANParks rangers manages the planning, strategising and combating of the fires in the area.

Due to the wind blowing in the direction of Kraaibosch, the firefighting efforts were concentrated on Keurhoek. “With the predicted wind direction of last night, the fire would have been pushed away from Rheenendal towards the N2. It was predicted that later the wind would turn, meaning that it would’ve run back into Rheenendal. Thankfully this didn’t happen, but we still needed to evacuate residents in the predicted path of the fire. Safety is always our first priority,” said Meyer.

### **Precautionary evacuation**

Keeping the weather pattern and wind conditions in mind, it was decided on Monday evening, 29 October, to evacuate residents from the Keurhoek, Rheenendal area. “The media incorrectly reported that all Rheenendal residents were evacuated. We only evacuated the elderly, infirm and small children,” explained Meyer.

Two hundred residents from Rheenendal were housed in the Brenton-on-Sea Community Hall and a further 21 at the Hornlee Community Hall.

At 06:55 this morning, 400 residents from Farleigh and Karatara were housed in Karatara, 30 in Rheenendal, and 180 residents at the Sedgefield Community Halls. Some Farleigh residents are also being housed at SANParks' Ebb & Flow rest camp.

### **Thanks to Stakeholders**

The Knysna Municipality thanks all who assisted those affected by the fires. "SASSA and the Western Cape Department of Social Services were on site at all the community halls to offer assistance and trauma counselling where necessary," explained Meyer. "We must thank the Gift of the Givers for once again stepping in to offer much needed assistance."

### **Fire is contained**

The fires burning in the Rheenendal, Karatara and Farleigh areas are currently contained and the Knysna Municipality is anxiously awaited the wind to drop at around 14:30, which will allow an Oryx helicopter to take off to start water bombing the area.

The Control Point will remain in Karatara.

### **NOTE TO EDITOR**

Further Information pertaining to the fires will be released following the Joint Operations Command (JOC) meeting late afternoon.

### **ENDS**

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