

**JOINT
MEDIA RELEASE**

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Water sample results in the Knysna estuary show improvement

Results of water samples taken on the 18th March 2019 indicate the Knysna estuary is safe for recreational use in all sites except the Ashmead Channel, Queen Street, the Train station, and Bongani. The Ashmead channel is not safe for use for swimming, bait collection, fishing or wading at present. This extends from the areas adjacent to Loerie Park, Cathy Park and up to the area next to Monk's Caravan Park. The Thesen island waterway on the Ashmead side is also not safe for use at present. Users of the estuary are encouraged to use compliant sites with the Department of Water Affairs guidelines including the Heads, Bollard Bay, the Point, Salt River, Crabs Creek, the Waterfront, the main channel and Belvidere. SANParks' deepwater samples indicate areas are compliant and confirm that the deeper waters and main channel are safe for use.

McCarthy (Health Officer for the Garden Route District Municipality) explains 'sampling will be done weekly by the District Municipality and in line with tidal flow. We are expecting a flush in 2-3 days and will definitely continue to sample thereafter.'

SANParks has erected signage at four (4) spots around the Knysna estuary warning recreational users not to fish, collect bait or swim there. Notices have been issued to tourism establishments around the area of concern so that they can warn guests not to use the unsafe area of the estuary. SANParks has also sent out regular ranger patrols to the affected area to warn people about the dangers of using the water.

Investigation into the causes of oil and grease that have entered the Waste water Treatment Works (WWTW), causing bacteria to die off and the WWTW to release high loads of *E.coli* into the estuary has led the Knysna Municipality and Garden Route District's Health division to sample and check all pump stations. James McCarthy of the District's Health division says 'we physically checked all the pump stations to find the cause. We have also sent notices to establishments closest to the stations found to have high levels of oil and grease to request proof of proper disposal of oil stores.'

Apart from this joint investigation, Knysna Municipality has tackled the problem at the WWTW by introducing an oil-eating enzyme into the system while regularly dosing the WWTW with beneficial bacteria from the Brenton-on-Sea waste water works.

A pre-directive was issued by the Breede-Gouritz Catchment Management Agency (BGCMA) to the Knysna Municipality subsequent to the spill from the WWTW. The Municipality will be given an opportunity to provide further action plans to rectify the situation. According to the Knysna Municipality, the good news is that oil and grease counts in the WWTW are a lot lower since the investigation into the matter two weeks ago.'

The BGCMA has also undertaken to do more regular chemical samples including pH levels, ammonia, nitrates, phosphates levels in the water and others. SANParks has also committed to continue with deepwater samples although they've come out positive. Park Manager for Knysna, Megan says 'in addition, we've committed to reviving and chairing the Knysna Estuary Pollution Committee to meet on a weekly basis to tackle this and any future incidents so that we protect the Knysna estuary's unique biodiversity and tourism value.'

Boilerplate: SANParks has also taken deepwater samples and results look positive which means animal and plant life in those areas were not affected by the spikes, such would include the Knysna seahorse, the Knysna Gobi and others. Independent researchers declared the Knysna estuary as number 1 in the country in terms of biodiversity significance back in 2005.

Picture: Knysna seahorse, SANParks

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