



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargo: Immediate

DATE: 14 June, 2017

Time: 11h00

MEDIA RELEASE FROM KNYSNA MAYOR ELEANORE BOUW-SPIES

Update on plans to rebuild Knysna

Today, Knysna Mayor, Eleanore Bouw-Spies met with the heads of the Knysna Fire emergency working groups to receive updates on various interventions aimed at rebuilding Greater Knysna.

Said Mayor Bouw-Spies: “Our municipal staff are working around the clock to ensure priority needs are met. Key priorities at this time include ensuring the wellbeing of those affected by the fires, and rebuilding key basic services infrastructure.

“I have just been informed that this was the largest operational deployment of firefighting resources and personnel in a single incident in South Africa’s history. The SANDF deployed 6 x Oryx’s, 2 x BK117s and Working on Fire provided us with 4 helicopters and 2 fixed wing Bombers.

“We are determined to rise again, and to rise even stronger than before.”

BASIC SERVICES INFRASTRUCTURE

The Knysna municipality has been working full steam ahead to restore basic services to all areas affected the fire.

Water trucks and bottled water are supplying Brenton-on-Sea and Brenton-on-Lake with water while the technical teams are working on restoring supply.

The Western Cape Government has been providing additional water points and chemical toilets to Paradise until such time as their water system has been restored.

It is envisaged that water will be restored to all areas by Saturday, 17 June. The Knysna Municipality is working hard to ensure this.

Electricity services have already been restored in all outlying areas.

Power supply to Larenhill, Eastford Country Estate, Riverglades, Belvidere and Buffels Bay will be restored by 16 June, Brenton-on-Lake by 17 June, and Brenton-on-Sea and 23 June. Brackenhill and Kruisfontein will have their power restored by 30 June.

As an interim measure, generators are scheduled to be put in place at the Belvidere Church and Brenton Community Hall by today, to enable residents to heat water and charge their cellphones.

HOUSING

A geotechnical study has been completed to assess the safety of the informal settlement area affected by the fire. This assessment found that the site is safe for rebuilding. A plan is currently being devised to ensure the optimal layout of new structures. It is envisaged that in addition to rebuilding homes on the site, proper services will be established, including sewerage, water and electricity.

The municipality is currently in the process of assessing all the homes lost due to the recent fires. The majority of assessments have taken place, with Belvidere, Brenton and Welbedacht underway at this time. These assessments will be used to establish the full extent of the damage.

We have received queries from residents around the disposal of rubble from affected sites. A temporary crushing facility is in the process of being established at the Fechtters site. We are working today on a plan to bring additional skips into the area. Further details will be communicated.

FINANCE

We are extremely thankful for all the donations received from members of the South African community, and abroad. A ring-fenced account has been established to receive monetary donations. Expenditure against this fund will be independently audited to ensure the utmost control and transparency. Clear objectives for this fund will be established at a special council meeting, which we are aiming to schedule by the end of this week.

The municipality urges all donators to be wary of scam accounts. The official account of the municipality is as follows:

Account name: Emergency Fund
Bank: Nedbank
Account number: 1147920699
Reference: KNYSNAFIRE
Swift code: NEDSZAJJ

SOCIAL SUPPORT

The Knysna area has been overwhelmed by the generous aid it has received from residents across South Africa. Our goal is to ensure that this relief aid is well managed through a coordinated and targeted distribution campaign.

It was brought to our attention that there were many cases of non-fire victims visiting the centres, preventing those in dire need of aid from proper access. As such, the ad hoc distribution centres set up in the immediate aftermath of the disaster have been closed (other than Sedgefield that continues to operate as usual). The closure was communicated to

communities through various channels, including through on-the-ground communications. We have seen some disruption at the previous distribution sites today, as despite our best efforts, not all residents will have received the message. Extra safety officers have been made available.

Our primary goal is to ensure the return of residents to their communities. Distribution to the northern areas affected by the fire will henceforth take place within the community. Distribution commenced at 11am today, in collaboration with NGO Gift of the Givers. To service the western areas, The Vineyard site has been reopened for collections, with stricter controls in place.

In addition to the above, a voucher system will be established to ensure beneficiary control.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The municipality, working with Knysna Tourism, is conducting a rapid reappraisal of its destination marketing plan. A quick recovery strategy is being devised, to ensure that tourists to Knysna feel welcome, and proceed with their bookings. The Oyster Festival is also scheduled to continue. It is crucial that we encourage tourism to return to the area, as this is a major driver of the economy.

A further update will be communicated at 11:00 tomorrow.

Bouw-Spies concluded: "Our thoughts are with all those affected by this devastating event and we thank each and every person who has contributed to alleviating the difficulties faced by our communities during this time. Knysna is on the path to rebuilding."

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