

High-level intergovernmental engagement on Knysna's water security

Knysna Municipality hosted a high-level engagement with senior representatives from national and provincial government today, 4 December, to address the increasingly urgent water challenges facing Greater Knysna. The session brought together technical experts and decision-makers to ensure that the municipality's immediate and long-term water security interventions receive the support, guidance and coordination they require.

The delegation was led by Mr Graham Paulse, the Head of the Department for Local Government in the Western Cape. He was accompanied by senior officials from the National Department of Water and Sanitation, provincial engineers, hydrologists, geohydrologists and specialists in infrastructure management and emergency response. The team engaged directly with Knysna's leadership and technical staff on the status of local water sources, current consumption trends and the municipality's contingency planning.

Knysna Executive Mayor Thando Matika opened the meeting with a detailed briefing on the water situation, noting the combined pressures of below-average rainfall, ongoing drought patterns across the Garden Route, saline intrusion in critical water sources and limited reservoir storage capacity in certain supply zones. "We are doing everything within our mandate to conserve water, repair infrastructure and plan new supply sources," he said. "But the truth is that Greater Knysna cannot navigate this challenge alone.

"The reality is that our system is under strain, and our communities are feeling it," Matika continued. "Today's engagement demonstrates that all spheres of government recognise the seriousness of our situation. We welcome the technical support, expertise and resources offered today and we will continue to work collaboratively to secure Greater Knysna's water future."

Presentation on contingency planning and current interventions

Municipal officials presented a comprehensive overview of the Knysna Water Contingency Plan, which is guided by the 2018 Drought Strategy and updated to respond to current conditions. The presentation covered the points discussed below.

Mayoral War Room

Established on 27 October 2025, the War Room meets weekly and brings together engineering, finance, communications, disaster management and operations teams to monitor risks, coordinate interventions and ensure real-time responses.

Level 4 water restrictions

Level 4 water restrictions were implemented from 3 December 2025, with tighter limits on non-essential use. The municipality noted that community cooperation remains vital to reducing pressure on the system. "Everyone knows that abnormally low rainfall has placed our region's water supply under immense pressure," said Matika. "Despite ongoing appeals raised through awareness campaigns, non-compliance is increasing and water consumption remains high. We need our residents, businesses and visitors to make a real effort to use water sparingly."

Immediate interventions

Immediate interventions include leak repairs, pressure management, zoning tests, telemetry restoration and updating the Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition system. Officials stressed that the current water conservation and demand management programme is already producing valuable data to guide further action.

Short-term, 3-month measures

- Advancing bulk metering across supply zones.
- Accelerating leak detection campaigns.
- Expanding pressure optimisation.
- Addressing high-risk informal areas with additional water tanking support.
- Increasing public communication, including SMSs, social media updates, mobile-app alerts and scheduled information blitzes.

Medium-term, 3 – 36 months projects

Attendees were briefed on several strategic projects already underway or in their planning stages, including:

- Buffalo Bay borehole testing (funded via the Water Resilience Grant);
- further groundwater exploration for Knysna;
- the Knysna Kruisvallei Dam Project, for which geotechnical drilling is currently being completed;
- upgrades to the Rheenendal bulk water supply;
- proposed upgrades for Karatara bulk supply (funding application in progress);
- reinvestigation of the Sedgfield off-channel storage dam and relocation of the water treatment works; and
- the Knysna Bulk Water Study, which will reassess long-term water augmentation options.

Collaborative problem-solving and support required

Municipal leadership highlighted key challenges requiring intergovernmental support, including:

- saline intrusion in the Knysna estuary system;
- the need to improve telemetry and infrastructure management systems;
- high water losses, which require a full water balance review;
- limited reservoir storage in certain supply zones; and
- additional tanker resources for emergency distribution.

Attendees with technical expertise offered guidance on regulatory, engineering and environmental considerations. The delegation affirmed its support for the municipality's ongoing and planned interventions and committed to working within established government frameworks to speed up approvals, unlock resources where possible and ensure coordinated responses across spheres. It was agreed that water security is a shared responsibility.

Strengthening water conservation and community communication

The municipality's water conservation campaign was reviewed during the meeting. There is a strong focus on public communication, particularly while level 4 restrictions remain in place. "While our own teams are working around the clock, reducing demand is absolutely essential," said Matika. "Consumption reductions cannot be confirmed at this stage as monitoring tools are still being calibrated, but conservation efforts remain a critical priority. We ask every person within the greater municipal area to use the least amount of water that is absolutely necessary."

Matika concluded by reiterating the municipality's commitment to working openly and constructively with all partners. "Water is the backbone of our community's wellbeing, our economy and our environmental heritage. Today's engagement gives us renewed confidence that we are not facing these challenges in isolation. Together with national and provincial government, and with the backing of our residents, we will continue working tirelessly to stabilise supply and build long-term resilience."

The municipality will continue to communicate regularly as further updates become available.

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