



Knysna

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Water augmentation plan gains momentum as multimillion-Rand projects move to implementation

Knysna Municipality's Joint Operations Centre update of 24 February 2026 reflects a decisive shift from short-term emergency measures to structured infrastructure intervention, with just under R36 million already committed to immediate water augmentation projects.

At the centre of the programme is the Emergency Groundwater Supply Project, including the Knysna Borehole Refurbishment Programme (Tender T27/2025/26). The project is valued at R4,5 million and was handed over on 17 February. Complementing this is the connecting infrastructure and civil works package, currently in procurement, which will integrate additional groundwater sources into the municipal network.

Executive Mayor Thando Matika said the municipality is focussing on restoring system reliability. "We are not dealing with isolated breakdowns. We are strengthening the backbone of our bulk water system. Groundwater has become a strategic resource for Knysna and we are ensuring that boreholes are not only drilled and refurbished, but fully connected and operational."

A series of pump station refurbishments form a critical part of this effort. These include upgrades to the Akkerkloof Dam pumpstation, Gouna pumpstation, Charlesford- and Eastford pumpstations, and the Glebe pumpstation. These projects are essential to stabilising abstraction and distribution capacity.

"Pump stations are the arteries of our water network. If they fail, the entire system suffers. These refurbishments may appear technical, but they are fundamental to securing consistent supply," Matika said.

Beyond immediate works, larger capital investments are in planning and approval phases. An emergency pumping scheme between the balancing dam and Akkerkloof Dam has been proposed, while a Water Services Infrastructure Grant funded borehole drilling and equipping programme across Sedgefield, Buffalo Bay and Knysna aims to expand raw water inputs.

Together, these short-term interventions total R35,85 million.

Looking ahead, medium-term capital projects linked to the PG Bison borehole system could amount to tens of millions over 18 months, subject to business plan approvals. These include the link to the Charlesford–Eastford pipeline and a connection to the Ruigtevlei Water Treatment Works.

"This is about long-term resilience. We are building capacity that will serve this town well beyond the current crisis. These are not temporary fixes, they are strategic investments in Knysna's future water security," Matika added.

Attention is also turning to the refurbishment of the Knysna Reverse Osmosis Plant, which requires immediate repairs and maintenance backlogs, alongside feedwater system upgrades.

"Partnerships remain vital to the successful implementation of these and other projects," Matika continued. "The Knysna Infrastructure Group borehole connection is pending service level agreement approval, while Gift of the Givers continues water carting from the PG Bison source at approximately 300 kilolitres per day."

Underscoring the value of partnerships, Matika held a meeting with Western Cape Provincial Minister of Local Government, Environmental Affairs and Development Planning, Anton Bredell, on 25 February, followed by an engagement with Council.

It was decided that the Western Cape Department of Local Government (WCDLG) and National Government would lead the support towards the municipality in terms of the Section 154 support plan. The WCDLG will second senior engineering staff for a period of six months to assist Knysna Municipality in addressing the water and sanitation crisis, including infrastructure repairs and water conservation efforts. This team will guide and manage the Water and Sanitation Unit.

“The WCDLG will assist us in developing a turnaround plan for the Infrastructure Department, with clear timelines and costing, within two weeks from adoption and being signed off by the principals,” Matika expanded. “We will also establish an integrated technical steering committee consisting of the Department of Water and Sanitation, Department of Co-operative Government and Traditional Affairs, the WCDLG and SALGA to support the team. We will work in collaboration with this committee to implement a comprehensive water management plan.

“Effective execution is as important as collaboration. Plans and budgets alone will not secure water. Delivery, adherence to timelines and strong contractor performance are now critical. Written feedback will be given weekly to the Provincial Minister of Local Government and Council on progress made and challenges experienced. The National Government, WCDLG, and the acting Municipal Manager will conduct an in-depth root cause analysis of the crisis, and thereafter, consequence management will be implemented. An Integrated Management of Accountability Framework will also be developed for Council approval. We need less talk and more action, our residents deserve progress they can see and experience,” he concluded.

The combined value of immediate and medium-term interventions signals one of the most substantial reinforcements of Knysna’s bulk water infrastructure in recent years, a programme that will ultimately determine how quickly stability can be restored.

For residents and businesses alike, the stakes are existential. Water is not merely a service, it is the backbone of public health, tourism, property value and economic stability.

ENDS

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