

Garden Route Environmental Seminar held at Brenton-on-Sea, Knysna

Tuesday, 05 December 2017

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Recently, the Garden Route Environmental Seminar brought officials representing the public sector, forestry companies, conservation bodies, academic institutions, as well as landowners together, to discuss the aftermath of the fires that recently destroyed parts of the Eden district, especially Knysna and Bitou.

The Seminar was held at the Community Hall of Brenton-on-Sea and took place from 23 to 24 November 2017. On the first day, the platform allowed all present to take part in active discussions and question-and-answer sessions, during which site visits were also conducted.

The discussions mainly focused on the Garden Route's ecology and the environmental recovery thereof. These discussions also made way for Western Cape Premier, Ms Helen Zille and Cllr Memory Booysen, Executive Mayor of the Eden District Municipality, to extend a word of gratitude to everybody who made a tremendous contribution towards the recovery of the area during the past couple of months.

Brenton-on-Sea Community Hall was fully packed while the Garden Route Environmental Seminar was underway.

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Mayor Booysen praised everyone for their efforts during and after the inferno and said: "Although it was one of the biggest disasters in the history of the country, within ten days the basic services were reconnected. The whole of Eden district came together to deal with the disaster of this magnitude," and added: "I want to thank each and everyone for all their efforts and also Premier Helen Zille for the initiatives that were run from her office".

During her keynote address, Premier Zille elaborated on the Garden Route Rebuild Initiative (GRRI), which is coordinated by Dr Hildergard Fast and she furthermore focused on the various work streams created through the initiative, as well as the progress made by each work stream.

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(Above, right) During the Seminar were (FLTR): Executive Mayor of the Eden District Municipality, Cllr Memory Booyesen, Mr Gerhard Otto, Eden DM Manager:•• Emergency Services (middle) with Western Cape Premier, Ms Helen Zille (right).

(Above, left) Executive Mayor of the Eden District Municipality, Cllr Memory Booyesen (left) and Dr Hildegard Fast, Coordinator of the Garden Route Rebuild Initiative (right), listening to the various speeches made at the Seminar.

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With reference to the efforts of the Environmental work stream, Premier Zille commended the team for the great projects implemented so far, namely:• the implementation of the Slope Stabilisation Project, the Fire Risk Reduction Process and the Hydro Seeding Projects. ••The GRRi is very much an ongoing project - and one that will become a model for the management of disasters and reconstruction, and perhaps even a tool that we can use before disaster hits,• the Premier said. Furthermore she thanked the Eden District and Knysna municipalities respectively which assisted with funding. Read more about the work streams at www.gardenrouter rebuild.co.za.

In terms of the rebuilding of infrastructure, Premier Zille confirmed that the Provincial Disaster Management Centre submitted an application of R194 million to the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC), of which the NDMC appointed a service provider to conduct a detailed assessment of each project. ••We believe it is a positive step which should result in the funding allocation,• Premier Zille added.

When advising Landowners in terms of the controlling of alien invasive plants, Premier Zille highlighted: ••Landowners must take responsibility for controlling alien invasive plants on their land.• It is critical to control the alien invasive plants while they are still young, as removing them then, would be much easier and cheaper•. She further explained: ••Be careful when removing these plants, as they also have a way of making sure that they are ••Kanniedood - onkruid vergaan nie•™. When you remove them, make sure that you remove them properly and that you do not help to propagate them,• Premier Zille further advised.

Premier Zille also spoke broadly about the drought crisis and challenges which the Western Cape Province is currently faced with. Ms Pam Booth, Environmental Manager at Knysna Municipality, stated that the town of Knysna is in desperate need of storage facilities for water. Premier Zille responded by saying that one needs to start looking at recycling of water resources and explained various concepts on how recycling methods can work for the crisis.

This successful engagement platform was arranged by the South Cape Landowners Initiative and co-hosted by the Garden Route Rebuild Initiative, Eden District Municipality, Knysna Municipality, Nelson Mandela University•™s Sustainable Research Unit, South Cape Fire Protection Association, Working on Fire and the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.