

Lack of sandy beaches in St Francis Bay under spotlight



Repair work done in Ralph Road. Photo: Miguel Auker



The dune spit protecting the canal system from the sea.

The St Francis Bay beach has taken a hammering this past winter of 2012 and the dune spit (see page 5) is in danger of being breached.

And there was much lamentation and disappointment expressed on the part of the past festive season about the lack of beach of low tide, with visitors having to go to Cape St Francis beach daily.

During the past two years there has been no government approved remedial project in place to save St Francis Bay's beach. The controversial Danish PEM system, implemented to solve the problem of loss of sand on the beach, came to an end in 2013. The Record of Decision (ROD) for work on the precarious dune spit and the beach eroded and a new EIA needs to be done for a new project that is proposed.

The only work that could be done on the beach since 2013 has been urgent remedial work by home owners to bolster revetments in front of their individual homes, plus on-going repairs organised by the town's residents' association, the SFBRA, to access stairs and pathways on to the main beaches.

In 2012 the municipality appointed Cape Town consultants Worley Parsons, to recommend what was required for the beach. In addition a beach committee was set up two years ago, chaired by local DA Councillor Sean Weaver. The committee was tasked to study all solutions and suggestions proposed for the beach and to come up with the best or further proposals.

According to Aitken, due to the severity of the beach erosion and the lack of sand, the beach committee had discussions with Kouga Council with a view to addressing the issue. This year Weaver asked the SFBRA to co-ordinate all activities pertaining to the 'Save St Francis Bay Beach Project'.

Aitken says the research findings conducted by Worley Parsons committee will be used as the basis for the way forward and further professional

opinion will be obtained.

According to Hilton Thorpe of the SFBRA, the consultants produced a desk-top study which proposed a three-phased approach. The proposals are:

- * geo-tube revetments to protect vulnerable dunes;
- * beach re-nourishment, using sand from the Kromme; and
- * sand retention through groynes or offshore reefs.

Analysts point out that these solutions have been proposed over the past 13 years in one form or another and that no solution is possible without adequate funds.

As for current remedial work, Aitken says during January this year a fair amount of work (organised by the SFBRA) was conducted to repair damaged revetments caused by last year's winter storms. In some places the revetments have been totally removed, new bulkheads installed and a 30 degree angle revetment installed. And last year the SFBRA also organised the repairs to the beach access at Peter's Place.

Also currently, the SFB Riparian Association is going ahead with a bid to use sandbags to protect the Spit. Chairman, Richard Foulis, says the association has given the contractor the go-ahead to install approximately 75 metres of sandbag protection which has been largely funded by donations from riparian homeowners.

"Once this has been completed we will assess the result and if successful then we will embark on a fundraising effort to try to raise sufficient funds to install sandbag protection along the complete length of the Spit," he says.

"The Spit is now at serious risk of being breached and in order to protect the St Francis canal we have to take immediate action to stop further erosion. As the SFB Riparian Assoc represents all property owners on the canal, we have been mandated to manage this process."

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Municipal News Snippets

Two of the bigger upgrade projects planned for St Francis Bay in the near future are for a sewerage upgrade and a new waste management site.

Sewerage Infrastructure

Kouga Municipality is intending to upgrade the waste water treatment works to improve capacity for it to connect more houses to the water-borne sewerage network. The municipality is currently busy with the Environmental Impact Studies for the project. The municipality is unable to say at this stage how much the whole project will cost as it must be guided by the studies - what the size of the project will be and how much work it will require.

Waste Management

The Kouga Municipality has been given a go-ahead by the Department of Environmental Affairs to close the current waste site near Sea Vista and for it to open a new transfer station. The opening of the transfer station is estimated to cost about R1.5 million. There will be job opportunities created but these will be confirmed at a later stage.

In total, R25 million is available for the opening of transfer stations and improvement of waste sites around Kouga in this joint venture between the department and the municipality - known as ECKouga Waste Management and Recycling.

Replacing cradles with closed dustbins

There were calls this past festive season for all St Francis residents to do away with cradles and use proper plastic dustbins with lids. This was following the overflow of rubbish lying in the open air in cradles awaiting the once-a-week pick up. The stench was unbearable in some places.

Long time residents say that in the early days rubbish used to be collected twice a week in seasons because there were fewer people on holiday here compared to the huge crowds arriving lately.

According to the Kouga Municipality, there are scheduled times for refuse collection for all areas and these are unfortunately the only times rubbish can be removed. "The population in Kouga has grown markedly and during the

holiday season all our towns are quite busy with visitors. As a municipality we have tried to meet the growing demand for our services, including employing temporary workers to help with keeping our towns clean," the municipality said when asked to comment.

The municipality did advise, however, that people should keep their waste in their backyard or close the refuse bag in full and only take it out on the day when the refuse truck comes around. "We have also advised residents that the 240 litre plastic wheely bin is probably the best solution."

Residents can approach a relevant store or contact the KIM Cleaning & Pests section on 042 205 8381 and ask them about acquiring one.