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
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Proposed Kouga Ward changes

By Bev Mortimer

Proposals pertaining to the St Francis area in the changing of Kouga Ward boundaries have elicited a mixed reaction among residents.

Some residents believe the changes to the ward structures are political, others think they will cause fragmentation in the different communities in St Francis, while yet others welcome the changes because it will make St Francis even more 'exclusive' and will keep the ward 'politically safe'.

At a meeting at the end of January, last month, the proposals were presented to attendees, but a quick survey indicated that many Kouga residents did not know about the meeting.

Nigel Aitken, chairman of the St Francis Bay Residents' Association (SFBRA) says a presentation was given by the Municipal Demarcation Board on 28 January regarding possible changes to ward structures within the Kouga Municipal region consisting of 15 wards. 'The proposal is to move both the Links and Sea Vista to Ward 1 (Oyster Bay) and Paradise Beach into Ward 12 (St Francis Bay area).'

'At this meeting the different political parties made further recommendations. The ANC would like to take a small portion of St Francis Bay around Homestead Avenue and incorporate that into Ward 1 as well.'

Aitken says he voiced his concerns that these changes are not practical and that one of the important criteria when looking at Ward changes is to avoid as far as possible the fragmentation of communities and that there should be identifiable Ward boundaries. He stated that the residents of Sea Vista are an integral part of the greater St Francis community and as such should remain within Ward 12.

Around seven of the proposals appeared to be acceptable to most people present. Kouga Municipality media department in a statement said the meeting was attended by stakeholders from across Kouga, including civic organisations and general members of the community from different wards.

'The purpose of the meeting was to get the views of the public on the proposals contained by the Board's report on how the Kouga wards should be structured.'

At the meeting Kouga Speaker Magdalene Dloomo said: 'The ward system is one of the building blocks of our democracy as the residents of each ward will elect a councillor to represent them in the Council. The purpose of the review is basically to ensure the wards are manageable in size and population for a ward councillor to care for that area.'

'The benefit to communities is improved communication and service delivery. Overall it strengthens our democracy by helping to bring people closer to their politicians who may be lodged.'

A Ward review is conducted every five years before local government elections are held to look at issues such as population growth and developments which may affect demarcation. The Board will consider all inputs and publish its first consolidated report in the SA Government Gazette, after which objections may be lodged.

People may still submit their views to the Board until 23 March 2015. All Kouga residents can voice concerns. Enquiries on procedures in this regard can be made at local municipal offices or by contacting a residents' association chairman or a ward councillor, or submit concerns to the Board at: www.demarcation.org.za. The earliest that final boundaries will be made public will be in August 2015.

In a statement on its website the DA political party for Kouga said there are 55 278 registered voters within Kouga and who are divided by 15 wards, there should be about 3885 voters per ward. A variance of 15% is allowed. For example, Ward 14 (Paradise Beach, Aston Bay, Tokyo Sea walls) has 4543 voters registered, while in Ward 2 (Pellicus) there are only 2040 registered voters.

'However, the Demarcation Board has come up with dramatic proposals that will totally change some wards,' the statement said.

'The next local government election will take place in 2016. The date of the election has not yet been announced but must take place within 90 days of the previous election date, which was 18 May.'

Currently the ANC hold 15 of the seats in the Kouga Council, with the DA holding the remaining 14 seats.'

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