

Burglars paid R70 to take things out of houses in Thyspunt vicinity

Scores of burglaries plus poaching incidents on Eskom's conservation area led to farmers asking Eskom to erect protective fencing across the R330 road from Sea Vista in St Francis Bay to keep intruders out and to save their lives, their homes, their livestock plus those of the wildlife in the conservation area.

This has been revealed after St Francis Chronicle investigated why security fencing had been erected on the R330 road to Cape St Francis.

The Eskom owned land and conservation area extends east and southwards to the sea and as far as Oyster Bay. It incorporates the tiny hamlets of Rebelus and Mostershoek.

Our investigation followed the publication of complaints by critics in newspapers and on social media that implied construction was already starting on the Thyspunt site and this is why the area was being fenced off. "So the nuclear station construction is underway. Never mind legal requirements, local community," one person complained in a letter to The Herald. "How do we stop them? This arrogance and contempt for due process is unacceptable."

Our investigation we discovered that farmers homes and other residential

homes in the Rebelus and Mostershoek area were broken into as many as six times each before the game fencing went up. Chairman of the Rebelus Homeowners Association, Warwick Sauer, says they stopped some guys carrying beds from a house. The critics said they had been paid R70 to break into houses and leave the furniture in the bushes for others to collect!

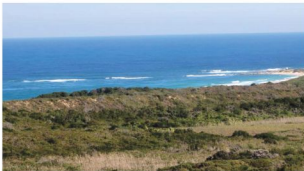
"Before the fencing there were break-ins every fortnight for 16 months. Plus there was lots of poaching going on – the area is teeming with bush buck, bush pigs and other game – there are even leopards here," Sauer said, adding that since the fence was erected things were quiet and farmers could sleep peacefully again at night. "We eventually had enough of these bad incidents and contacted Eskom to ask them to protect their land with a security fencing."

Eskom, he said agreed to this as it would protect the farmers lives and property, plus the fauna and flora. Moreover, in the event of Thyspunt nuclear power becoming a reality, a security fence would have to be erected. "They said they could not put up two fences one now and another maybe in the future. So they decided on one security fence which would protect the farmers, their livestock and homes and the fauna."

About 40 farmers and property owners belonging to the two associations in the area wanted the fencing. There are more than 70 farmers in the area.

The Eskom source told St Francis Chronicle that after the dreadful 2012 fires on the St Francis Bay canals that destroyed 76 homes, landowners of the region were asked to try to get rid of alien vegetation which was contributing to the fire hazard. Eskom removed the alien vegetation from the eastern side of the Thyspunt site, which they would do anyway as part of their nature conservation efforts.

The resulting bush thinning immediately led to an increase in the number of trespassers coming onto the Thyspunt property, because the existing cattle fence that had always



been there was easy to cross. These then followed a number of burglaries on other properties where it appeared that the burglars had crossed the Eskom land. Property owners asked Eskom to improve the security of the fence. At the time some barbed wire was added to the fence, as a rapid response security measure.

Meantime, there were almost daily occurrence of cattle and other animals breaking through the fence, because the old fence was corroded and degraded in places.

Furthermore, the Thyspunt environmental team recently found other animal snares. As natural wildlife increases, such as wild buck species they are becoming an attractive target for poachers.

"The Eskom people then held a meeting with local property owners and as a result decided to replace much of the old fence with a good quality new fence."

The Eskom source says an EIA was unnecessary for an environmental authorisation. The Green Scorpions unit that falls under the department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs inspected the new fence and found that it served the purpose for which a fence had originally been designed. These

monitor the environment and investigate environmental crimes such as illegal dumping of waste, illegal deep-sea fishing, smuggling ivory, and illegal property development.

Eskom started buying property and farms to form the Thyspunt site from 1989. The conservation areas will be preserved and protected regardless of whether Thyspunt is chosen as the next nuclear site, the Eskom source says. If it isn't Eskom may resell the land and farms or keep them as conservation areas.

Sauer however, reveals that Eskom has decided to create a massive conservation area. He envisaged that it could be used to protect plenty of game and fauna and that in the future this area could become a private or national game farm.

Sauer also stressed the importance of finishing the fencing as it is incomplete. "Ideally we would like to see the fencing going all the way to Rocky Coast farm to prevent any more thieves and poachers gaining access."

Sauer pointed out all the farmers were not necessarily pro nuclear. They were pragmatic and needed to protect their lives, their livestock and the wildlife. It was good that Eskom was working together with them to ensure this was done.

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