

New plan for Paradise Beach causeway evokes more controversy

Kouga Municipality's new 'pumping water' plan for the Paradise Beach and Aston Bay causeway in Jeffreys Bay, started this month, has been subject to a fair amount of controversy and criticism already.

The municipality started pumping water from the Seekoei estuary on Monday (4 September) to clear the causeway of water and increase the safety of motorists. The causeway is the main access route to Paradise Beach.

However, critics on social media believe the plan has no chance of success.

Executive Mayor, Elza van Lingen, said the municipality had an urgent meeting last week with stakeholders, including the Department of Environmental Affairs, Department of Water and Sanitation and the Department of Roads and Public Works, to identify short, medium and long-term solutions to the problem.

The meeting was called after heavy rains and stormy seas increased the water levels of the Seekoei estuary to such an extent that the causeway became submerged. The alternative gravel road becomes slippery when it rains and consequently many Paradise Beach residents are marooned when the causeway is submerged.

The mayor said breaching the estuary mouth artificially to lower the water levels, as some critics have suggested, is not an option. "The law does not allow for it because breaching the mouth artificially could actually increase the risk of properties along the embankments flooding," she explained.

"It was, therefore, agreed that the best alternative would be to pump water from the estuary. Our aim is to drop the water level by 15cm to 20cm. We are also looking at ways, including



Photo: Ronel Meyer

floats and velocity breakers, to minimise the chop of the water and limit the amount of spray that washes over the causeway surface."

Two of the critics of the 'pumping of water' solution, who spoke to St Francis Chronicle are John Wiehahn and a reader who has provided an alias of 'King Canute'.

Wiehahn says warnings and repeated predictions of the imminent flooding of the Seekoei causeway repeatedly and predictably fallen on deaf ears.

"As the law does not allow for the artificial breaching of the mouth, it was decided that the excess water would be pumped out of the Estuary into the sea, using two high volume water pumps. Much as we applaud the efforts and sentiment, we believe that

this option has no chance of success whatsoever.

"We also question the Mayor's ill-advised assertion that houses could be flooded if the mouth is artificially breached," he said.

Wiehahn referred to The National Environmental Integrated Coastal Management Act (No. 24 of 2008) - Eastern Cape Coastal Management program, amended by Act No. 36 of 2014: Integrated Coastal Management Amendment Act provides for Municipal Roles and Requirements, as per the Integrated Development Plan 2017-2022, with specific reference to 7.5.8 Disaster Management, as per section 53 (1) of the Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002, which stipulates that each Municipality must:

- Prepare a disaster management plan for its area according to the circumstances prevailing in the area;

- Anticipate the types of disasters that are likely to occur and possible effects;

- Place emphasis on measures that reduces the vulnerability of disaster-prone areas, communities and households.

- Consider indigenous knowledge relating to disaster management.

Presenting his criticism of the plan, King Canute writes: "This plan smacks to be in the same league as my futile attempt to turn the tide."

"The only pump that I know that is capable of performing the function that is now proposed would be a dredger alluvial pump, they home make them for the west coast diamond divers. "Without capacity tables for the flooded zone it is difficult to estimate volume. The only fixed measurement is the 300mm. That is apparently the distance that they want to drop the current water level."

"I can only estimate the average width and length to try and work out the volume. For purposes of this exercise let's take 700 metres for average width and say 5 Km average length."

"That comes to 1,050,000,000 litres. To pump this amount out would be no fruitless expenditure on a grand scale. On top of this one cannot ignore the possibility of rain in the catchment area

over the next couple of days which will add to the problem. "Even if I have over calculated by 500Kl, I still think I have a point."

"The obvious answer that will have minimal cost is use gravity and cut a channel."

Meanwhile in related matters to the causeway, the municipality earlier this year entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Nelson Mandela University for the drawing up of an Estuarine Management Plan to enable Council to make an informed decision about a permanent, long-term solution. The research team will hold public meetings towards the end of September and the plan is expected to be finalised by March 2018.

Van Lingen said a serious point of concern that had been raised by Prof Tris Woodridge, of the research team, was that little to no fresh water was flowing into the estuary because of the many irrigation dams in the Seekoei and Swart Rivers. "We need to restore the natural balance of the estuary so as to mitigate the flood risk to properties and infrastructure in the vicinity. In order to achieve this, fresh water needs to flow into the system."

The mayor says not all dams in the Seekoei and Swart Rivers are legal. The Department of Water and Sanitation has undertaken to address this as a matter of urgency so illegal dams can be removed and the fresh water flow restored.

There are also fresh-water ponds in Paradise Beach that possibly used to flow into the system and the municipality is looking at ways to link these ponds back up to the estuary.

Meanwhile the Eastern Cape Department of Roads and Public Works, under whose jurisdiction the alternative gravel road falls, had undertaken to ensure that this road is properly maintained. It will cost about R80-million to tar this section and the Department does not have funding at this stage. The mayor aimed to ensure tarring of the road is on the Kouga Municipality's Integrated Development Plan for future planning purposes."

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