

Kouga communities threaten more protests over "poor service delivery and broken promises"

Several Kouga communities have threatened more protests in Kouga owing to funds earmarked for services in their areas being diverted to Kouga Municipality's budget to raise funds to secure more water for the area, such as digging boreholes.

Some protesting community members on the roadside outside Humansdorp told this paper they were protesting because they believe the municipality should find other sources of revenue, rather than take promised services away from the poor.

This protest on the Humansdorp Road, closed the direct road, the R330 from Humansdorp to St Francis at the beginning of this month for a whole day. Although the road was cleared after two hours by the special SAPS POP unit that came from Port Elizabeth, a small group of some of the protestors hung around the sides of the road all day and when a few pelted a couple of cars with stones, the municipality kept the road blocked for the rest of the day.

And while, on the one hand, the Kouga ANC branch says diverting money from services for water needs is one of the main reasons the ANC boycotted what they call "the DA SOMA Roadshow", Kouga's mayor, Etzra van Lingen, has asked Ward Councilors to support their communities to the urgency of the water situation.

The Kouga ANC caucus, in a press release to the media, said Kwanomzamo Ward 6 Community Hall was earmarked for an upgrade. This money was according to the ANC diverted for a water budget. Angry residents of Ward 6 set the Community hall alight during the protests and it was badly damaged. (see photos of cleanup, above, right)

In a press release sent to the media, by the Kouga ANC caucus, it stated that before the build-up towards the 2016 Local Government Elections, the ANC warned people of Kouga that the DA "is not a caring organisation but rather a party that is interested in the preservation of white privilege."

The ANC Caucus in Kouga said it "boycotted the Council Opening Speech for two consecutive years since the inauguration of Council in 2016 for many reasons, a few of which are:

- Non-implementation of IDP & Budget Projects including the dilapidated condition of roads in township areas and including the removal of (expenditure) on KwaNomzamo Community Hall from the Budget - hence the protest march in Humansdorp.
- The Mayor is spearheading a programme to withhold the handing over title deeds to housing beneficiaries and to manipulate housing list for the upcoming housing project to favour friends & family members of the DA leaders.

- Non-compliance with the Employment Equity where consultation with employees and organised labour was not done in terms of section 16 and 17 of the Labour Relations Act but reported to have been done where

the municipality is on the verge of being fined R1.5 million by the department of Labour.

- Solidarity with the dismissal of 74 Municipal Contract Workers who were serving the municipality with hard labour providing for their families for three to five years while the DA promised jobs.

- The Mayor established a Youth Forum to facilitate youth development, yet is not recognising the structure & playing politics with the future of young people.

- Lastly ANC Councilors boycotted the SOMA as they believed they could add more value by servicing communities during the day rather than listening to empty promise speeches of the mayor."

SOMA this year was a low key affair with no VIP mayors or officials or mainstream media invited, or in attendance (except for DA bloggers). Speaking about the diversion of funds during SOMA held at the Lombardini event venue, van Lingen said the Council declared a local state of disaster on 31 May 2017, which was renewed earlier last month.

A disaster declaration adds muscle to what a Council can do to mitigate the impact of that disaster, including re-prioritising the budget and re-allocating staff and resources to implement emergency relief measures, she said. This also allows a municipality to access relief funding from provincial and national government.

The Sarah Baartman district, of which Kouga forms part, was declared a provincial drought disaster area on 4 December 2017, and the Eastern Cape was declared a national drought disaster area last month on 13 February 2018.

Prior to these declarations, in order for the municipality to augment the water supply to Kouga towns, it had to fund the implementation itself, save for an allocation of R1-million that the municipality received from the district last year.

This led "the municipality to re-prioritise our existing budget and cut allocations to other services areas, so as to fund those emergency measures required to pull our communities through this disaster. This has not been received well by all communities, leading to threats of protest action."

The mayor said this highlights the need for a stronger educational drive around water. She also asked ward councilors, in particular, to sensitise their communities to the urgency of the water situation. "Only if we are united, can we steer our communities safely through this dire situation."

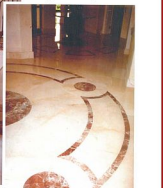
Photos and the story on the protest, plus highlights of the lengthy SOMA speech are available on FB at our page: <https://business.facebook.com/stfranchronicle>

True African flavour and red carpeting missing at SOMA 2017 - see p14



Ward 6 Councilor, Lefty Vumazonke, Community Work Programme workers and community volunteers, cleaned up the KwaNomzamo Community Hall on 14 March after it was set alight during a community protest the previous week. Vumazonke said: "Burning of public infrastructure should never be allowed and community members must be in the forefront of combating criminal behaviour."

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High Class Marble Factory opens in St Francis



St Francis Bay now boasts a high-class marble factory, Marble Design International (MDI), which specialises in Marble, Granite and Stone Quartz.

The company, owned by Fernando Gamba, has been in operation in Johannesburg for the past 28 years and its stunning superior products grace many homes and businesses in South Africa. MDI recently relocated to St Francis Bay and opened its doors in

the Sea Vista Industrial area at the beginning of January this year. MDI specialises in custom-made staircases, wall cladding, kitchen and bathroom tops. Plus the company offers technical design for its clients' approval before production.

Fernando says he looks forward to meeting and working with residents, businesses, holiday home owners, plus visitors to St Francis.

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