



## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **DWS MONITORING KNYSNA WATER CRISIS AND COORDINATING SHORT-, MEDIUM- AND LONG-TERM INTERVENTIONS**

09 January 2026

The National Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS) notes with serious concern the escalating water supply challenges currently affecting Knysna and other coastal towns within the Garden Route District. The Department is working closely with the Western Cape Provincial Government, Knysna Municipality, and other municipalities which are Water Services Authorities to safeguard water security and mitigate the impact of the crisis on residents, businesses, and the tourism sector.

#### **Current Status of Water Security in Knysna**

Knysna's water supply system has reached a critical stage. The Akkerkloof Dam, the municipality's primary storage facility, is currently at approximately 19% full, translating to an estimated 13 days of usable water at present consumption levels. The situation constitutes a serious water security crisis and warrants immediate and collective action from all sectors of society.

Compounding this pressure are below-normal rainfall patterns, reduced river flows due to drought conditions, and recent incidents of infrastructure vandalism. These factors have significantly reduced inflows into the system and further constrained the Municipality's ability to meet growing demand.

#### **Intergovernmental Coordination and Emergency Structures**

In response to the deteriorating situation, a Joint Operations Committee (JOC), a standing intergovernmental structure, has been activated to oversee coordinated interventions. The structure is co-chaired by DWS, the Western Cape Department of Local Government and Knysna Municipality and draws technical and regulatory support from the Breede-Olifants Catchment Management Agency (BOCMA) and the Garden Route District Municipality.

The JOC is tasked with planning and executing short-term emergency measures, medium-term resilience interventions, as well as longer-term water resource solutions to reduce vulnerability to future climatic and environmental shocks.

#### **Regulatory and Compliance Measures**

Given the severity of the crisis, DWS through its regulatory and water resource management functions has directed the Municipality to urgently explore and activate alternative water sources. These include groundwater abstraction, borehole development, reuse technologies, and temporary augmentation schemes.

**SOUTH AFRICA IS A WATER-SCARCE COUNTRY**





DWS together with BOCMA, the Western Cape Department of Environmental Affairs and Knysna Municipality, will implement a Compliance and Enforcement Blitz to assess adherence to water use authorisations, imposed restrictions and environmental regulations. This intervention is intended to prevent illegal abstraction, wastage, and non-compliance that could further compromise available supply.

### **Short- to Medium-Term Interventions Underway**

The following measures are currently being monitored by DWS in collaboration with the JOC:

1. Demand reduction initiatives encouraging all water users to significantly curtail consumption.
2. Sourcing and blending of additional water supply where technically feasible.
3. Enforcement and monitoring of Level 4 water restrictions.
4. Public communication and awareness campaigns to keep residents and visitors informed.
5. Preventative maintenance of critical infrastructure to minimise unplanned outages or leak-related water losses.

These actions are aimed at extending available supply, delaying system failure, and preserving reserves for priority domestic and public health needs.

### **Climate Change and Long-Term Adaptation**

The current crisis underscores the growing impact of climate change on water resources, particularly in coastal and tourism-driven municipalities. The Department reiterates that Water Services Authorities can no longer rely exclusively on surface water systems and must diversify portfolios through a mix of:

- groundwater development
- water reuse and recycling
- stormwater capture
- desalination (where feasible)
- improved demand management and efficiency of water use.

To support institutional resilience, DWS is further assisting Knysna Municipality through its Policy Development Special Project to develop and implement new Water and Sanitation By-Laws, enabling more effective regulation, tariff alignment, and enforcement capacity going forward.

### **Appeal to Stakeholders and the Public**

DWS remains concerned about the potential socio-economic implications of the crisis on households, public services, the local economy, and the tourism industry particularly during peak season. The Department therefore appeals to all residents, businesses, and visitors to use water sparingly and responsibly.



The Department condemns recent incidents of vandalism of municipal infrastructure and calls upon community members to report such actions to law enforcement authorities.

### **Assurance and Way Forward**

DWS wishes to reassure the public that the national, provincial and district spheres of government, along with sector stakeholders, are aligned and working collectively to stabilise water supply and improve system resilience in Knysna and the broader Garden Route coastal route.

Progress updates will be communicated to the public as further interventions are implemented and as conditions evolve.

**END**

**Issued by the Department of Water & Sanitation For more information, contact DWS Head of Communications, Dr Mandla Mathebula on 083 235 8675/ [MathebulaM@dws.gov.za](mailto:MathebulaM@dws.gov.za)**

**For media releases, speeches and news visit the Water & Sanitation portal at: [www.dws.gov.za](http://www.dws.gov.za)**