# Mayor’s Speech at Ordinary Council Meeting on 31 January 2022

Since the inauguration of the Council on 22 November 2021, Municipal staff and relevant Councillors have been extremely busy tackling numerous issues. As you will recall we experienced severe floods and it was only in the following days that we could get to grips with the damage to our water network amongst all the other damage. On that day our Garden Route Dam also overflowed for the first time at its increased capacity level. Two weeks later we again experienced a major rainstorm that simply added to the damage.

We systematically did a determination of the extent of the damages that were submitted as claims in terms of the Disaster Management Committee requirements. The National DMC has recommended that over R230m of these claims be approved. It is not clear when these grants will be paid out but we expect that this will only be forthcoming in a future financial year. Within our claims we also made provision, as requested, for preventative measures for such eventualities in the future.

From the beginning of December, the acting Municipal Manager, Dr Gratz, chaired a Season Preparedness Monitoring Committee that met daily to oversee preparations for the holiday season. This process progressively improved, filtering down to our entire municipal team who became motivated to eagerly undertake their tasks. While many staff members from all Directorates, across the organisation were involved, it is probably fair to say that Protection and Community Services were in the forefront. We are exceedingly proud of their achievements and in recognition thereof, certificates will be awarded shortly.

It has been broadly acknowledged that the Season proved to be busier than normal in terms of the numbers of visitors and for the economy as well – bringing a welcome relief to the negative effects experienced within the economy at the end of 2020 and during both 2020 and 2021. Many would have benefited from employment and the resultant job security that a bumper December-January provides for the winter months ahead.

During the close attention to detail, it became clear that there are a number of areas requiring attention. I name a few. There are vendors who continue to sell fireworks thereby exposing members of the public and animals to the dangers resulting therefrom; also there were members of the public who brought liquor to the beaches. We also had members of the public who continued to want to walk their dogs on beaches where we are attempting to achieve international tourism recognition for a Blue Flag beach. Blue Flag status requires stringent testing of water quality. During this testing and the follow-up investigations it is growing evidence that we probably have private property owners who are using conservancy tanks instead of the municipal sewer system but then fail to have their tanks emptied regularly. Spillage from these tanks then appears to enter water courses. This matter is being dealt with. Transgressions as I have described above are going to be addressed in a tightening up of by-laws and fines. Possibly we need to add community service to these penalties in some instances.

Intertwined with our holiday season, we also faced concerns about our Water supply and usage. The flood and rain damage resulted in pipeline breakages, often along river-banks and in heavily forested areas. Our average daily water usage escalated from 32 ML (or 32 million litres) around late November, firstly to 34-35ML and then to 38-40ML from mid-December. The maximum capacity at our existing Old and New Water Treatment Works is 39 ML. Pipe breakages in the Christmas-New Year period were extremely concerning because of the already low levels of our main clean water reservoirs that hold approximately 36 hours of storage at normal pre-November levels.

We are extremely thankful to Bitou and Oudtshoorn Municipalities who were able to send water repair teams to assist our teams working through the night to get these lines repaired.

These breakages, and usage levels exceeding treatment capacities on numerous days resulted in our clean water reservoirs being almost emptied to only hold reserve water for 2-3 hours’ usage. I should explain that while our Dam is full, this untreated water is then pumped to the Water Treatment Works where the water is then treated (or “suiwered” in Afrikaans) to get the clear tap water that we receive in our homes which is then pumped to reservoirs around the Municipality in the distribution network.

The increase in water usage has been 25%. In our estimation, a household should function adequately at 15 KL (15000 litre) per month, the equivalent of 0,5KL. For every additional 1000 houses added per year, this equates to 0,5ML. If we then assume business uses another 0,5ML for these 1000 houses, this translates to 1 ML. The increase of 7 ML over 2 months is therefore not easily explained as yet. An in-depth analysis is underway. In the meantime, water restrictions have been imposed. As of this morning at 06h20 we had 28ML in our main reservoirs, equivalent to 18 hours reserve. This is the best position we have been in for the past 6 weeks at least. This is the result of a concerted effort over the past two weeks.

We thank all the consumers who have heeded the concerns and warnings that have been issued in recent weeks.

Council will also by now be aware that George has been awarded a RBIG (Regional Bulk Infrastructure Grant) of R1,17bn for specific improvements in Water Infrastructure following our application to National Treasury for a BFI facility (Budget Facility for Infrastructure) through which we have received funding over the 40 next months to complete the projects, which include an increase in water treatment capacity by 50% from 40 ML to 60 ML along with additional reservoirs. The Supply Chain processes for these projects are already underway and certain works to the value of R82m have been accelerated into the present financial year ending in June 2022.

In the past week, a strategic session was held between the Directors and the Mayco team to identify and progress various strategic options that are required to be undertaken over the next few years. These discussions included the improvement of safety measures through increases in law enforcement personnel and CCTV cameras, mitigation of the risks of Eskom load-shedding, upscaling of data analytics, refuse management and driving economic activity and tourism.

On Tuesday afternoon, 25 January 2022, we received notification from the Auditor-General that George Municipality has received an unqualified audit opinion with no findings on the annual performance report for the year ended 30 June 2021. This is what is known as a “clean audit report”. Congratulations are therefore due to the AMM, the Chief Financial Officer, Mr Riaan du Plessis, the Finance team, Internal Audit and all the Directorates who have put in a huge effort over the last few weeks, months and year to ensure that we achieve this milestone, which in turn helps us in taking George forward.

In Closing, thank you to Dr Gratz, the Directors and all our staff who have carried us through December and January. There are also numerous councillors who have been hard at work dealing with the critical matters that I have spoken about and numerous issues that they have managed in their wards and portfolios.

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