

20 March 2020

Attention: The City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality:

To: Mr Richard Nel  
Manager for the Water Quality  
Improvement Project  
City of Cape Town Metropolitan  
Municipality

Per: E-mail:  
[Richard.Nell@capetown.gov.za](mailto:Richard.Nell@capetown.gov.za)

CC: Mr Michael Webster  
Office of the Executive Director:  
Water and Waste Services

Per: E-mail:  
[Michael.Webster@capetown.gov.za](mailto:Michael.Webster@capetown.gov.za)

Dear Sirs,

**RE: MILNERTON / DIEP RIVER WATER CONTAMINATION**  
**OUR REF: L9/BD/04**  
**YOUR REF: UNKNOWN**

1. Our meeting held on 18 March 2020 refers.
2. We wish to express our thanks to the city for engaging with Andrea Korff, Wayne Duvenage and myself to discuss the citizens' concerns about the dire- and ongoing water quality situation in the Diep River system.
3. We further wish to summarise the main elements of this discussion and input that you provided us as follows:
  - 3.1 The problem existed for a number of years and the City of Cape Town is taking this matter seriously and treating it as a crisis;
  - 3.2 Unfortunately, the solution does not have a silver bullet and the problem is a multifaceted challenge with various complexities;
  - 3.3 The Mayor has assigned additional resources to regularly provide feedback and updates on the progress made in this matter;

- 3.4 This problem is not confined to a specific area and that the city faces similar issues throughout its jurisdiction and beyond;
  - 3.5 The issues cut across many departments. Therefore, there is a transversal program in place headed up by Mr Richard Nel to coordinate efforts of the various entities to attend to the matter;
  - 3.6 There are five work streams in place to address this unacceptable situation ranging from capital expenditure budgets (allocated over the next five years) to upgrade and increase the capacity of the Potsdam Wastewater Treatment Works by 53% (please correct us if we misheard the number) by 2025. Other work streams include communications, education, enforcement and other tasks;
  - 3.7 Included in the work stream plans are medium to short term interventions which are currently being implemented (tenders being finalised, contractors being appointed) to tackle water quantity and quality issues;
  - 3.8 Weekly water testing and monitoring is being conducted by the City;
  - 3.9 The National oversight authorities are satisfied with the City's current action plan to address the problem;
  - 3.10 Due to the complexity of the issue, the City is unable to give OUTA a deadline as to when the water quality of the area will return to levels that are within the threshold parameters as contained in the Potsdam Wastewater Treatment Works' Water Use license;
  - 3.11 The City has agreed to provide us with their detailed action plan which is currently being compiled and is in response to the pollution issues. Kindly indicate as to when we will be able to receive same;
  - 3.12 The City has also agreed to point us to the link on the City's website where the past several years' water monitoring and testing results can be found. The City has also agreed that we will have access to the water tests going forward;
  - 3.13 The City also indicated that they have exchanged correspondence with the Department of Water and Sanitation, regarding the Potsdam Wastewater Treatment Works' Water Use License conditions. Kindly would the city provide OUTA with the correspondence;
4. While we appreciate the input and explanations given and the efforts that the City undertook to rectify the situation, OUTA's frustration and that of the residents in the area affected by the extremely poor and dangerous water quality situation, are as follow:-
- 4.1 As we indicated during our conversation, OUTA and the residents are extremely frustrated. This problem has been in existence for a number of

years and the City has been aware thereof yet little meaningful action has been taken until recently;

4.2 To our knowledge, no one within the City has been taken to task or held accountable for what is nothing short of a criminal offence. The criminal conduct aspect of the situation does not appear to be recognised and was not at all considered in the past. We therefore request that the City provide us with the actions of accountability the City has taken in this regard;

4.3 Although we appreciate the input provided, we do not get a sense that urgency and alternative solutions have been exhausted by the City. Every day highly contaminated and dangerous water flows into the river and wetlands, is a day too long.

5. Further to our discussion, we would like to add the following:-

5.1 We believe that education of residents in the informal settlements is but one of a range of action items that need to take place to reduce the sewage flow into the stormwater system. It appears that your education efforts are however not enough due to sheer living conditions and convenience factors such as disposing effluent into the stormwater system. In this regard, we believe the city needs to take more drastic steps, such as:- (a) introducing sufficient portable/ chemical toilets, (b) building more permanent communal ablution facilities and (c) constructing/ introducing "low flow" diversion of stormwater runoff into the sewage system, in and around the informal settlements.

These three elements alone will have a substantive impact on reducing the flow of sewage into the Diep River and surrounding wetlands.

Please explain if the city has already implemented the above three suggestions and if so, when and if not, why not?

5.2 While the city has indicated their inability to provide timelines for the various actions that will bring the water quality in line with legal standards, we believe this is possible.

5.3 We are also aware that since the drought situation, water use volumes have remained constant and possibly even lower than the pre-drought period. It implies that despite the need to upgrade the Potsdam Wastewater Treatment Works' capacity, with its current size if well maintained and dredged, the system should be able to cope with current volumes and produce properly treated effluent.

6. In light of the above, we sincerely believe that the city should be able to provide a plan that displays a greater sense of urgency and will introduce additional elements (some suggested above) in order to provide OUTA and the local residents with an estimated time period wherein the City will be able to bring the water quality levels within acceptable standards.

7. Aside from the action plan to fix the issues, we believe that the City needs to also contemplate criminal charges against those individuals responsible for this situation.
8. We trust that working together, we can find urgent and lasting solution to these issues. OUTA will engage with the City in due course regarding this and other similar matters.
9. We look forward to receiving the City's action plan and responses to our questions and actions raised above.
10. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact our Ms Andrea Korff on [andrea.korff@outa.co.za](mailto:andrea.korff@outa.co.za).
11. We trust you find the above in order.
12. Kindly acknowledge receipt of this letter.

Yours Sincerely,



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Stefanie Fick  
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