



Wes-Kaapse Provinsiale Parlement Western Cape Provincial Parliament IPalamente yePhondo leNtshona Koloni

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Report of the Standing Committee on Local Government, on oversight visits to the Stellenbosch Aerial Firefighting Base and Provincial Disaster Management Centre on 18 February 2015, dated 27 March 2015.

Delegation

The delegation consisted of the following members:

Mnqasela, M (DA)(Chairperson)
Dyantyi, QR (ANC)
Hinana, NE (DA)
Max, LH (DA)
Paulsen, N (EFF)

1. Introduction

The purpose of the visit was to conduct oversight over how the Department of Local Government (the Department) executes its mandate in relation to disaster management. The other component of the visit was to gain an understanding of the operations of the Provincial Disaster Management Centre (PDMC) located in Parow and the Stellenbosch Aerial Firefighting Base located at the Stellenbosch airfields. The Province serves on a range of Intergovernmental Disaster Management Co-ordinating Structures which range from District Advisory Forums to National District Management Advisory Forums. Throughout the visit the Department was therefore also requested to make mention of how such intergovernmental structures operate in practice during disaster management and prevention efforts.

The Western Cape Provincial Disaster Management Centre was established in terms of section 29 of the Disaster Management Act (Act 57 of 2002). The Act mandates PDMCs to, amongst others, specialise in issues concerning disasters and disaster management in the Province; and promote an integrated and co-ordinated approach to disaster management in the Province, with special emphasis on prevention and mitigation.

The Stellenbosch Aerial Firefighting Base is one of nine such bases across the Province. These airbases are complemented by 31 runways at which aircraft can replenish water during firefighting efforts. The Aerial Support Programme was initiated by the Department in 2011. Through this Programme the Department contracts aircraft which they make available to district municipalities and the City of Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality. The Province contracts 24 aircraft whilst the City of Cape Town contracts an additional three aircraft. The Western Cape also has the capacity to assist other provinces with their aerial firefighting capacity, having done so most recently in the Northern Cape.

2. Overview of the visit

The Committee undertook the oversight visits on Wednesday, 18 February 2015. The Committee commenced the programme with the visit to the Stellenbosch Aerial Firefighting Base where Mr E Du Toit, Deputy Director: Fire Brigade Services and Mr C Deiner, Chief Director: Disaster Management and Fire Services, briefed the Committee on aerial operations that have taken place during the current wildlife fire season. This season stretches over five months, from November to March.

The Committee members met pilots as well as members of one of the firefighting teams employed through the Extended Public Works and Working for Fire Programmes. The Chairperson commended them for their selfless service to the people of the Western Cape.

As part of the oversight visit members went on a flight on a refurbished Huey helicopter. This allowed members to observe the aerial operations underway to combat a fire that had started on the Helderberg mountain in Grabouw.

3. Findings and Observations at the Stellenbosch Aerial Firefighting Base

- 3.1 Each rapid response aerial deployment (also known as sortis) consists of one helicopter that transports a fire fighting team, two bomber aircraft and one spotter aircraft. The spotter aircraft is in contact with the Command Centre at the base. As at 17 February 2015, 60 of these sortis have been deployed for the current fire season whilst 78 sortis were deployed for the entire 2013/2014 fire season.
- 3.2 The level of preparedness of the base is dependent on the Fire Danger Index (FDI) which is issued by the South African Weather Service.
- 3.3 Since the inception of the Programme there has been a year- on-year increase in the percentage of fires that are contained during the first hour of starting. The 2013/2014 success rate being 97%.
- 3.4 Death as a result of fire is the 4th leading cause of deaths in South Africa, accounting for 7% of all deaths in 2012.
- 3.5 The Department has developed an integrated intervention strategy related to fire. This strategy includes Enforcement, Educational, Engineering, Empowerment and Environmental mechanism components.

4. Findings and Observations at the Provincial Disaster Management Centre

- 4.1 There have been no disaster declarations thus far for 2014/2015.
- 4.2 The main risks in the Western Cape are flooding, fires, droughts, human and animal disease, chemical emergencies and electrical emergencies.
- 4.3 The areas at highest risk to coastal hazards along the City of Cape Town are Melkbosstrand, Bloubergstrand, Milnerton, Hout Bay, Noordhoek, Kommetjie, Glencairn , Fish Hoek , Muizenberg , Monwabisi/Macassar and Strand.

- 4.4 With regards to catastrophic response planning, the Province has a Special Operations capacity of 100 trained respondents with Provincial equipment caches in Cape Town and Breede Valley.
- 4.5 With regards to the outbreak of the Ebola pandemic, the Western Cape is considered to be at low risk due to its location and time needed to travel from affected areas.
- 4.6 The Department assists municipalities with proactive drought response planning including storm water canal maintenance, river maintenance and estuarine management.
- 4.7 During service delivery protests the PDMC is activated in support of security structures and to allow coordination of intervention plans.
- 4.8 The Department has established the Wolwekloof Training Academy, which is a facility that provides training and continuous development for persons working in emergency response environments. Courses offered to date include, amongst others, Wilderness Search and Rescue, Swift Water Rescue and Leadership for Scene Management.
- 4.9 Over the last couple of years there have been considerable improvement in the functioning of the national Disaster Management Centre.
- 4.10 The City of Cape Town is one of 11 cities internationally that have been designated as model cities by the United Nations office on Integrated Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction.
- 4.11 During the tour of the Centre the Committee observed:
 - 4.11.1 The functioning of the interactive video-wall, which is a web-based decision support tool that allows for the display of key data, including, for example, the location of power stations.
 - 4.11.2 The satellite system that allows the Department to detect large fires; and
 - 4.11.3 How the Emergency Medical Services remotely monitor the occurrence and response to road accidents.

4. Information requested by the Committee

The Committee REQUESTED that the Department of Local Government submits:

- 4.1. A geographic breakdown of the 7% of deaths that have occurred as a result of fires; and
- 4.2. An overview of the Disaster Management capacity of District Municipalities across the Province.

M MNQASELA (MPP)

CHAIRPERSON: STANDING COMMITTEE ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
26 MARCH 2015

