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## NATURES VALLEY RATEPAYERS' ASSOCIATION

### CHAIRMAN'S REPORT, DECEMBER 2025

#### 1. Introduction and Thanks.

- **General**

It is hard to accept that another year has gone so quickly but it is with pleasure that I am able to report once again on the activities of the NVRA Committee over the past 12 months, and the general state of affairs in this special part of SA, which continues to be subject to rapid growth and never ending demand on precious resources.

The Southern Cape is suffering from of an extended period without significant rainfall, going back to around Easter. The area relies on regular rainfall in the inland catchment area, to keep the rivers flowing as there are no significant storage dams in the area. There are several large housing developments being planned and under construction in the Bitou area and plans for increasing storage capacity are not even in the "pipeline" as far as we are aware.

Bitou is currently operating under Level 3 water restrictions which apply also to NV. Details of these restrictions have been issued to all consumers with Bitou invoices and are available on the Bitou Municipality website.

We are however fortunate the municipality and Western Cape Government continue to spend money on infrastructure and maintenance in the area and systems, roads and services function well in the Bitou municipal area.

- **NV Special Rating Area**

It is gratifying to see that the NVSRA is functioning as intended with successful management of the baboon populations with only a few successful invasions by lone raiders, the planned CCTV infrastructure has been completed, and the verge clearing is being very effectively managed. Thanks are due to the management team of Rob Nicol, James Martin and Paul Richards and invaluable support from the Bitou Superintendent, Marco Barnardo.

- **Thanks to NVRA Committee and Others**

My thanks also to the NVRA Committee consisting of James Martin who looks after the admin and finances, Paul Richards and Paul Vlaming who deal with Infrastructure issues, Johann de Wet who takes care of Plan approvals and assists with Built Environment issues generally, Peter May responsible for Newsletters and who assists with Built Environment matters and Mark Langton involved in Water, Sewerage and Environmental issues.

Our Co-opted "specialists" Conrad Wiehahn (Town Planning), Ian Palmer (Sewerage) and Roy Parkhurst (Website) have provided valuable input during the year for which we are grateful. I am very sad to report that Paul Erens, a past chairman of the NVRA and who

continued to serve as a co-opted member passed on in February this year. He will be sadly missed.

Thanks also to Annamarie Kovacik who mans the office and handles NVRA and SRA administration. She has had some health issues this year so please treat her with care!

Thanks as always are due to Marco Barnardo who plays such a vital role in ensuring municipal services in NV are effective and enhanced by his input.

A special thankyou to Deon Neethling who has generously undertaken the repair and upgrading of the public braai facilities at the lagoon, which will be completed before the start of the season.

- **NVRA Mandated Role**

The NVRA's main focus in working on behalf of the Ratepayers can be summarised as follows:

- Liaison with Bitou Municipality on service delivery related to; Sewerage, Water, Roads, Stormwater Drainage, Electricity, Waste Management.
- Review of Building Plans and assisting owners and architects in their compliance with the Title Deeds and building guidelines.
- Liaison with Bitou Municipality Town Planning and Building Control on any matters affecting Natures Valley.
- Liaison with SANParks in relation to Contractual National Park Agreement and SANParks activities in the area.

The NVRA was established in 1970 and has a constitution which defines its role in protecting the interests of the ratepayers. The Constitution can be viewed on the NVRA Website ([www.nvra.co.za](http://www.nvra.co.za))

- **Main issues addressed in report**

Natures Valley continues to be well cared for thanks to the efforts of our Superintendent, Marco Barnardo and the close working relationship he has with the organisations involved in administering the affairs of the village, the NVRA, the NVSRA and the NVT. It's good to be able to report progress with the building of the new water reservoir and some progress towards resolving the debate around the acceptability of Septic Tanks in the long term. The establishment of NV as an Overlay Zone has made good progress.

- **NVRA Committee**

I am pleased to advise that all current members have agreed to stand for re-election to the NVRA committee in 2026.

Any NV owners who would like to serve on the NVRA committee in 2026 are to please contact Annamarie, so that the necessary paperwork can be dealt with prior to the AGM on the 18<sup>th</sup> December.

Each of the committee members is allocated a portfolio for their attention during the year and the committee meets formally in the NV office once every 2 months.

## **2. Departures and Arrivals**

- It is sad to report, that the following members of the NV community passed away this year:

Paul Erens, Erf 316

Fay Howard, Erf 195

Chris Denysschen, Erf 201

Marie Wagenaar, Erf410  
Maddelina Anderson, Erf 455  
Dr Jan Pieterse, formerly Erf 212  
Mrs Sturgess, Erf 165  
Michael Webb, Erf 231  
Andre van Niekerk, Erf 194

Our sincere condolences to family and friends and apologies if the list is incomplete.

- **Departures and New Owners**

According to our records it has been a quiet year with no activity. People are obviously settling down for a while!

### **3. Municipal Matters and Infrastructure.**

- **Municipal activities**

The municipality continues to be led by the DA under the leadership of Councillor Jessica Kamkam and the stability which she has brought to the affairs of the Council are appreciated by all Bitou residents.

- **Integrated Development Plan (IDP) Budget**

Each year the NVRA submits a schedule of “Needs and Wants” to Bitou Municipality via the Ward Committee as required by the Municipality as part of the IDP process. The budget which is finalised in March/April each year, establishes the municipal expenditure budget on a rolling 3-year basis. The matters included in the NVRA submission for 2026/27 relate to: Water supply, Sewage Management, Public Toilets, Roads, Road Safety, Stormwater Drainage and Electrical Infrastructure. The current NVRA IDP submission, for the financial year 26/27 will be posted on the NVRA website.

- **IDP Capital Budget**

The current capital budget for 25/26, 26/27 and 27/28 includes the following provisions which directly affect NV.

R 4,25 m for a new reservoir, which is currently under construction and around R 10m over the next 3 years for upgrading the WTW.

The IDP Budget for 26/27, 27/28, 28/29 will be published in April next year. We are closing in on 2030!

- **Water and Sewerage**

- **New Reservoir**

The budget issue which delayed the start to the construction of the new NV reservoir in 2024 was resolved and following a new tender process a contractor was appointed in August this year and it is gratifying to see that this important project is proceeding well and is being very professionally managed. As advised in a recent Newsflash sent to all NV owners, there will be a period early next year when the village will be fed from temporary storage tanks for about 6 weeks and water use will need to be limited to household consumption only.

- **NV water reticulation**

The water reticulation piping in NV, which is asbestos and over 70 years old remains a concern and several failures have occurred during the year. These breakages are always attended to speedily by Marco with good support from the Bitou maintenance team. The NVRA will continue to motivate for budget to be allocated to replacement of this system.

- **Water Treatment Works Upgrade**

The current IDP budget allows for upgrades to the water treatment plant which treats water drawn from the Groot Rivier and supplies the reservoir on the hill-side. A recurring threat to this water supply occurs when the estuary mouth is closed, with high seas causing very high levels in the lagoon which, on occasions, has resulted in salt water contaminating the freshwater intake. We are

given to understand that the current IDP budget includes for investigating and implementing a solution to this problem.

- **Septic Tanks vs Cons Tanks**

As reported in previous years the NVRA have serious concerns about the long term impact of the conversion of septic tanks serving houses in the valley, to conservancy tanks. The municipality have agreed in principle with proposals made by the NVRA to retain septic tanks wherever these are shown to function effectively. The municipality requested a Motivation Report from the NVRA for submission to Council to get a final decision on this long outstanding matter. The report (which can be viewed on the NVRA website) was presented to the Engineering Dept in October but an official comment has not been received.

- **Public Toilets**

The issue of improving the servicing and useability of the public toilets has been discussed and it has been agreed to experiment with locking these facilities overnight as is done with most municipal facilities. Lockable gates will be installed on the lagoon toilets before the December season to test their effectiveness.

- **Roads and Road Safety**

- **Lagoon Road**

The paved section of Lagoon Drive remains a contentious issue when it comes to responsibility for upgrading or even repairs. The municipality are of the opinion that it is a Provincial road and efforts to find the right official to make a decision have not been successful to date.

- **Potholes repairs**

These are dealt with as they arise by Marco with good assistance from Bitou, so our roads are in relatively good condition. A few years back Bitou arranged for the repaving of Lagoon Drive and 50% of the NV internal roads. The request for completion of this exercise remains on our IDP wish list.

- **Speedhumps and road safety**

The issue of speed control and road safety is a top priority in NV and a major concern to most owners. The traffic signage has been dramatically improved over the last few years and the "official" speed limit was reduced to 30Kph last year.

As previously reported, we have identified the need for 11 additional speed humps, 5 of which would be in St Andrews, which has become the route of choice for drivers in a hurry. The municipality have a limited budget for speed bumps and in our discussions with Roads Dept, it is clear that they believe there are already too many humps in the village by normal standards. However, it is the only effective way of controlling speeding in NV. Two "plastic button" bumps were installed in St Andrews last year as a test as these are considerably less expensive than traditional tarmac humps. They have made a difference but unfortunately, do not slow down bakkies and the like, which need a gravity defying bump to get respect, in addition they can be hazardous to cyclists.

An appeal was sent out very recently to all owners asking for contributions to a fund for building traditional speedhumps. Approval is required for permission to build speed humps on municipal roads and quotations have been obtained for building these to municipal specs, which is around R20 000 per hump.

Some owners have already indicated their willingness to contribute and your co-operation in making meaningful progress in this long-running saga would obviously be much appreciated by all owners. Unfortunately, it is not practical to get a contractor on site to build 1 or 2 humps so we need to build up a reasonable fund which would be ring-fenced for this project. Excess funds!! will be used to repair old humps and improve road safety wherever possible.

- **Electrical**

The electrical infrastructure in NV remains relatively reliable, and power outages are generally the result of problems with the incoming Eskom supply. The mini-sub on the corner of Heather and St.Michaels failed and had to be replaced in a hurry this year.

- **Waste Management**

- **Extensions to WTS**

The extension to the recycling section of the WTS which were carried out last year to improve the neatness of the facility and minimise the attractiveness to marauders has worked well and the CCTV which has been installed at the WTS appears to be assisting in reducing “bad behaviour” by the users or abusers of this facility. The cost of these upgrades were covered by the SRA as part of their mandate to manage the baboons and improve security.

- **Recycling protocols**

The trend towards effective recycling by NV residents and visitors has grown substantially over the years and the provision of additional recycling bins and a proper enclosure have made a big difference. A very big thankyou is due to Marco and his team and the effort they put into ensuring that the WTS is kept in good shape. Bitou Municipalities collections from the facility have also become reliable and generally “cleaner”. We can thank the baboons for demanding an improvement in human behaviour when it comes to waste disposal.

Problems have been experienced when recyclables are placed in black bags. These are not taken away by the recycling contractor as it is not obvious whether the bag contains recyclables or general kitchen waste. Owners, visitors and tenants are therefore asked to please use the clear bags for recyclables. These bags are available from the municipality at no charge.

- **Beach Path Bins**

The waste bins at the beach paths must not be used for large bags of waste. These bins are intended for smaller, loose items and if they overflow or have bags dumped alongside them act as an attraction to baboons, monkeys, birds and other animals that rip the bags apart. If you have excess waste bags that won't fit into your weekly wheelie bin or if you are leaving the Valley, please leave extra bags at the WTS and help keep the Valley clean and baboon unfriendly.

- **Fire Safety**

I am sure all are fully aware that Natures Valley and the entire Southern Cape region are going through an extended dry period. You will notice that the vegetation in the forests is looking stressed and there is considerable dry material in the understorey. In other words, conditions are ideal for run-away fires. All owners are asked to be particularly careful when making braai fires and must make sure that their fires are extinguished when closing-up for the night.

Owners are reminded that open fires are not permitted on the beach, lagoon edge, coastal dune or any surrounding forest area, except in designated braai areas.

If any sign of fire or smoke in the area is noticed, please don't hesitate to contact Bitou Fire Dept at 044 533 5000. Alternatively, the Bitou Helpline 0861 24 8686

Bitou Fire Dept are in close liaison with the Southern Cape Fire Protection Association (SCFPA) who will also take action as necessary to respond to fire call-outs.

The NVRA are members of the SCFPA and The Craggs Fire Management Unit is their local fire fighting unit, who would be despatched quickly to an emergency in NV or nearby areas.

#### **4. NV Built Environment**

- **General**

One of the most important functions of the NVRA is to ensure that building plans submitted for approval comply with the Title Deeds for the property. With very few exceptions, all properties in NV are zoned single residential and the title deeds are identical. The NVRA have received legal opinions which confirm that the title deeds are praedial in nature and that all owners (not just neighbours) have a right to object to developments in the Valley which are not in compliance with the Title Deeds.

The NVRA have developed a good working relationship with Bitou Municipality who require that building plans are scrutinised by the NVRA Built Environment sub-committee, to ensure compliance with the title deeds. Bitou Municipality are very aware of the importance of compliance with the title deeds, which take preference over the Zoning Scheme, except where the zoning scheme regulations are more stringent (specifically the maximum height). The Title Deeds allow 12,5m but the Bitou Zoning Scheme only permits 8,5m.

Obviously, there are instances where absolute compliance is not practical for one reason or another. Any such deviation is subject to an established municipal process to lift or relax a title deed restriction. The NVRA, as an interested and affected party will review the application. If rational, well-motivated and not detrimental to neighbours or other owners it will be supported. If not, the NVRA will object to the application and a final decision is made by the Bitou Town Planners. Should the decision not be in the interest of the community, the matter could be appealed or legal action instituted. Fortunately, such instances are rare and usually an acceptable compromise is reached.

- **Plan approvals and Objections**

The NVRA have dealt with 10 building plans submitted for consideration in the period Dec 24 to end Nov 25. Of these, 1 was for a new home with the remainder being alterations and additions.

There are a number of properties in the Valley where apparent illegal building has taken place and these are being dealt with together with the owners and the municipality to resolve the issues in an acceptable way, where possible.

- **NV Overlay Zone**

The NVRA's application for NV to be registered as an Overlay Zone in terms of the Bitou Zoning Scheme Regulations which were gazetted in July 2023, has made good progress this year. As mentioned in last years Chairmans Report, the NVRA appointed a Knysna based Town Planner to manage the process on behalf of the NVRA. The draft documentation motivating to establish NV as an Overlay Zone, was completed after extensive liaison and input from the NVRA Built Environment sub-committee and submitted to Bitou for comment in June. Bitou Town Planning have since confirmed that they are happy with the application in principle, and that they believe that there is merit in NV being established as an Overlay Zone in view of the unique development constraints which apply in NV as compared with other areas in Bitou.

Unfortunately, since submitting the document, little noticeable progress has been made. Bitou Town Planning have indicated that this is the first such application they have dealt with and it is therefore taking time to process, as advice is being sort from other Western Cape municipalities about procedures. We are concerned that we have had no written comment on their deliberations thus far and have not been asked to clarify any issues, but It is more than likely that they will request changes in the documents.

When the draft document is "approved" by Town Planning it will be sent out by the municipality for comment by selected parties, and at the same time will be sent to all NV owners for their comment. The comments will then be considered and, where necessary, modifications made before receiving final approval.

We sincerely hope that the new year will bring with it some urgency on the part of the Municipality with this application.

In the end, the NV Title Deeds remain the main regulatory document for development or building works in NV, but having an Overlay Zone in place will strengthen the legislation and act as protection against changes in administration at the municipality and at the NVRA. The Title Deeds remain crucial in ensuring that NV retains its unique character, and restrictions on sub-division, genuine second dwellings and any other form of densification are critical to retaining this character and, for its long-term survival in view of the minimal and basic infrastructure, which is very unlikely to be enhanced.

- **Island Erven**

As mentioned in last years report, the "Island Erven" which adjoin the SANParks camp site are still shown on the municipal zoning map as residential properties. These 21 plots are currently owned by the State, but progress was made this year in an effort to get them transferred to SANParks to become part of the Tsitsikamma NP. SANParks has appointed a consultant to set up the processes required to progress the matter and a site inspection was held by all interested parties in Sept, to understand the situation on the ground. Co-operation from SANParks has been good and we are optimistic that this matter will be concluded in 2026, ensuring that these sites will never be developed.

- **Fences and the NVRA Building Guidelines**

A concerning trend amongst new home builders and even existing properties is the erection of fences which are not appropriate for NV. Although timber is still widely used, it is common that fences are now 2 m high, with no spacing between planks and no gap between the ground and the bottom of the fence. This “opaqueness” creates a very suburban look to the streetscape and prevents the free movement of small animals, which in the end will reduce the presence of certain birds and mammals in the village. The issue of fencing is not covered by the Title Deeds and the Bitou Zoning scheme regulations have been changed to allow walls and fencing 2 m high rather than 1,8m previously. The installation of fencing doesn’t require municipal approval, and there is little “control” over this trend. The NVRA Building Guidelines encourage owners to consider the environmental impact of fencing, but there is no legislation governing the aesthetics, materials or design principles. It is clear that privacy and security are uppermost in most new owner’s minds, (and many long-standing owners) but we ask that respect for the environment and ambience of NV is taken into account when you think about fencing. Brick walls should not be considered. NV is more than just a place to have a holiday; it is a place to retreat to, relax and enjoy the unspoilt beauty of the surroundings. The village cannot be allowed to become just another suburb by the sea.

The Draft Overlay Zone makes mention of fencing as an important aspect of the ambience of NV and consideration will be given to introducing some measure of control in the design of fencing in the final document.

The NVRA Building Guidelines, which also refer to Contractor protocols, can be viewed on the NVRA Website and are available at the NVRA office.

## 5. Environment

- **Contractual National Park (CNP) and SANParks liaison**

The NVRA committee continue to have close liaison with SANParks particularly via the Section Ranger, Elias Mtumimunya who is stationed at Bloukrans Forest Station.

The Tripartite CNP Agreement between the NVRA, SANParks and Bitou Municipality remains in place although there is a need to review the responsibilities scheduled in the agreement, which was drawn up in 1994. The original agreement was valid for 30 years to Sept 2024, however it is automatically extended for a further 10 years as there was no application to terminate the agreement.

As previously advised, in terms of this agreement SANParks are the custodians of certain municipal erven in NV, specifically the coastal dune and the property between Lagoon Drive and the lagoon edge, extending from the lagoon parking area to the R102. The maintenance and servicing of the public facilities within these spaces (toilet buildings and pathways) are the responsibility of SANParks with assistance from the municipality.

SANParks are empowered to ensure that only environmentally acceptable activities take place in the areas under their custodianship.

- **Estuary Management**

SANParks have completed a Draft Estuary Management Plan for the Groot Rivier, which was presented to interested parties in the NV Community Hall earlier this year and NVRA comments have been sent to SANParks. Apart from addressing environmental management, the plan will set out clear procedures for the artificial breaching of the estuary although there are already procedures in place, which will probably not change much. The process of breaching the mouth, which is unfortunately essential to ensure that the NV water supply is not contaminated with salt water and also to avoid sewage contamination of the lagoon, emanating from septic tanks and conservancy tanks in properties adjacent to the lagoon, which become flooded.

The process of breaching has not been easy to manage this year due to high seas and limited rainfall. We are fortunate to have expertise of Marco Barnardo to co-ordinate this process which is handled by the municipality with the agreement and assistance from SANParks.

- **Water sampling**

The Garden Route Municipality carry out routine monthly testing of drinking water samples as well as water from the lagoon and upriver. The test results are available on the NVRA website.

The presence of e-coli in the lagoon has remained well within acceptable limits

- **Beach washaway.**

During August- September, high seas and powerful tidal surges ate away at the coastal dune at beach path 4 (Blue Flag beach). The lifeguard's hut was undermined to the extent that it had to be removed. Access to this beach has become very difficult as the stairs down to the beach were damaged and there is a steep drop. It is not clear at this stage whether the Blue Flag beach will be in operation this year.

- **NV Urban Conservancy**

The NVRA and the NVT continue to have a close working relationship and try to complement each other's roles and activities wherever possible. The Trust's work to establish NV as an Urban Conservancy is an ongoing project which in time will benefit all owners and visitors to NV.

The potential threat to the Salt River as a result of the major housing development project at Kurland Village is a concern and the NVT, and many other interested and affected parties are keeping close tabs on the planning for this development.

- **Signage**

Advertising signage around NV and at the entrance to the village needs some tidying up and free-standing "temporary" signs have become permanent. This matter will be addressed in the new year.

- **Kudu award**

The SANParks Kudu Award which was awarded jointly to the NVRA and NVT last year was used to replace the automatic controls of the irrigation system serving the Phyl Martin Park. Both parties felt this made good use of the R 20 000 value of the award.

## **6. Support for the NVRA**

The NVRA is a voluntary association, set up in the 1970's to protect the interest of Natures Valley ratepayers, and over the years has been instrumental in ensuring and maintaining the balance between development and environmental integrity in this unique and special spot in SA. The NVRA relies on the support of the majority of owners in their negotiations with the municipality and other organisations on their behalf. In addition, financial contributions are vital in ensuring the effective ongoing administration of the Association, to undertake relatively minor, but important, projects in NV and to build up reserves for specialist input, legal opinions and other costly challenges which have to be dealt with from time to time.

As Chairman, I appeal to all owners, new and old to show financial support for the NVRA. The recommended contribution is R500 per annum, but any amount is welcome. We are very grateful to those owners who over the years continue to contribute more than the recommended amount. The NVRA financial year ends on 30th of June 2026.

### **BANK DETAILS:**

NVRA, Standard Bank, Plettenberg Bay, Branch no. 050714,

Account No: 082609217

PLEASE place your ERF NUMBER and NAME on the EFT so that we can identify who the payment comes from. If you can send a confirmation email to Annamarie Kovacik at [office@nvra.co.za](mailto:office@nvra.co.za) or phone her on 044 531 6699, that would be a great help.

## **11. In Conclusion**

I sincerely hope that this report has been informative and that the efforts of the NVRA over the past year have contributed positively to your investment in, and enjoyment of Natures Valley.

A very successful “bring and braai” was hosted by the NVRA in Sept this year which was well supported by the residents. The weather was good and it will hopefully become a regular feature going forward.

We encourage more owners and their families to attend the AGM each year as it is a good opportunity to raise issues which you feel should be addressed or receive consideration by the incoming committee. The NVRA AGM (combined with the NVSRA AGM) will take place on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> December at 1700 in the NG Kerk Hall in St Georges Ave.

On behalf of the NVRA Committee, I wish all owners and their families a happy festive season and all the very best for 2026.

**Doug Blaine**

Chairman