



PLETTENBERG BAY COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT FORUM

WHAT IS THE FORUM?

The Plettenberg Bay Community Environment Forum is a non-political, non-profit organisation made up of a group of conservation agencies, environmental NGOs and concerned individuals that have been involved in the protection of the environment and the promotion of sustainable development in the Bitou area for the past 14 years.

WHY WAS THE FORUM ESTABLISHED?

The Bitou area's beauty and appeal come from its magnificent setting and natural splendour. These assets, on which our tourism economy is founded, are at times threatened by over-exploitation and inappropriate development, made worse by the impacts of climate change. The need to balance expansion, resource use and development with the protection and wise use of the environment is therefore more critical than ever.

Our guiding principle has been to achieve sustainable development of our unique and beautiful surroundings by encouraging observation of the law, best practice and good governance by decision-making authorities.

WHO ARE THE FORUM'S MEMBERS?

Representatives of the following organisations regularly attend Forum meetings:

- Nature's Valley Trust
- Eden to Addo
- Botanical Society of South Africa
- Plett Bird Club
- CapeNature Conservation
- SA National Parks
- Orca Foundation
- Crags Conservancy
- Ratepayers' Association
- WESSA
- Bitou Municipality
- Eden District Municipality
- Garden Route Initiative
- Indalo Conservancy

Any concerned individuals are welcome to attend any of the monthly meetings.

All our members are unpaid volunteers and freely give of their time and expertise to keep our Bay and its surrounds as natural and unspoilt as possible.

HOW DOES THE FORUM OPERATE?

The Forum holds monthly meetings at which any issue that might have a negative impact on the environment can be raised and debated. Follow-up action could

include site visits, negotiations with property owners and developers, approaches to relevant authorities and project initiation.

We prefer to negotiate when dealing with breaches of environmental legislation but we do initiate legal action as a last resort.

WHAT HAS THE FORUM ACHIEVED RECENTLY?

The Forum has compiled a detailed Environment Management Framework for the Bitou and Keurbooms Rivers and estuary. This included topographical and vegetation sensitivity maps together with other important ecological information. It is now widely used by environmental consultants, estate agents, property developers and planning authorities.

The Forum has been at the forefront as an interested and affected party in commenting on proposed developments on or near the Robberg Nature Reserve, at the Blackwood Forest, Sanderlings Phase II and on the Look-out Rocks, which has now been declared a nature reserve. In addition, the Forum was active in ensuring that the scale and density of the Hanglip Estate in the Bitou Valley was greatly reduced.

The Forum has held many negotiations with landowners, property developers and building contractors to ensure that their activities have the minimum impact on the environment. We then closely monitor their performance to ensure their compliance with agreements reached.

The Forum has taken an active part in a provincial government initiative known as "The Coming Together Project", which is supported by the Bitou Municipality and has the aim of bringing our communities together in a sustainable future.

MAJOR ISSUES DEALT WITH DURING 2011

Relationship with Bitou Municipality

The Forum has established a good working relationship with the new council and holds regular meetings with municipal officials. Matters being dealt with include:

- *Water management.* Issues discussed are water abstraction from the Keurbooms River and the possibility of an off-stream storage dam, the desalination plant and the need for a Water User's Association.
- *Waste management and recycling.* The existing Municipal dump site is already 12 metres above its design capacity and an alternative is urgently required. The Forum has commented on the options available including the possible transfer of waste and more intensive recycling.
- *Power line across Bitou wetland.* The Forum is closely monitoring the proposed power line across the wetland to ensure all environmental legislation is fully complied with.

Jet skis in the Bay

The Forum assisted in the planning of the jet ski protest held on Central Beach during the Wedge Classic Event. The protest was successful and about 150 residents presented a petition to the Mayor demanding that jet skis should be banned from the Bay during the whale season. The Mayor undertook to give careful consideration to any future applications to stage jet ski races in the Bay.

It is of major concern to the whale-watching boat operators that very few whales have been seen in the Bay this year. A detailed study of the impact that jet skis

have on marine life is being undertaken by one of our members.

The Qolweni Conservancy

Residents of the Qolweni Township led by Kenneth Magaga with the support of the Orca Foundation have established a CapeNature Conservancy as an umbrella organisation that will focus on environmental management and community upliftment in the township. The Forum attended the launch of the Conservancy (the first in a township in the Western Cape) and will provide on-going support and advice on environmental and development matters.

Representations to MEC for Environmental Affairs

The Forum is in the process of compiling a report addressed to the Provincial Minister of Environmental Affairs which details past environmental infringements and unresolved issues in the Bitou Municipal Area. The Minister will be requested to exercise his powers and intervene to ensure that solutions are found and, where appropriate, corrective action is taken.

Boardwalk across the Robberg Vlei

The Forum has objected to the use of creosote treated poles in the construction of a boardwalk across the vlei as the toxins in the creosote are known to impact on wetland life. We continue to monitor the situation as the developer has refuted the evidence that creosote will have a long-term negative impact on the vlei.

Environmental Legislation

The Forum is in the process of organising an information sharing workshop on environmental legislation to which we will

invite developers, building contractors, estate agents, environmental consultants, relevant NGOs and the Municipality. Our intention is to ensure that all organisations whose activities may have an impact on the environment are fully informed of the governing legislation.

Keurbooms Estuary

The Forum has participated in the development of the Keurbooms Estuary Management Plan and is represented on the committee that meets regularly to discuss issues such as water use, impacts on the estuary, management and law enforcement.

WHAT CHALLENGES LIE AHEAD?

Apart from the many new and ongoing issues that the Forum is called upon to deal with, we are intending to focus some of our resources on longer term challenges to Bitou, such as the effects of climate change, improved rain water harvesting and waste recycling, removal of alien vegetation and the finalisation of an Urban Edge for Plettenberg Bay which will ensure the long-term protection of our natural assets.

HOW IS THE FORUM FUNDED?

The Forum requires funds to monitor developments, implement projects and to cover its legal and admin expenses, which includes secretarial services. Funds have been raised through auctions and generous donations by concerned residents and visitors. If the Forum is to continue to fulfil its vital role as Bitou's community environmental watchdog, ongoing financial support will be required. Please support us in our efforts to protect the environment and keep Bitou beautiful by making a tax deductible donation to the Forum.

WAYS IN WHICH YOU CAN MAKE A CONTRIBUTION TO THE CAUSE

Apart from personal participation, which is always highly appreciated, the Forum also needs money to do its work. If you wish to help the Forum through a donation you can use any of the following methods:

1. Pay money directly into our bank account by Internet transfer

Bank account details are as follows:

Account name: Plettenberg Bay Community Environment Forum
Bank: Standard Bank of South Africa
Branch: Plettenberg Bay
Branch code: 050714
Account number: 186861508
Reference: Your name and "Donation"

2. By cheque

Cheques can be made out to Plettenberg Bay Community Environment Forum and posted to the address below.

Please send the co-ordinator an email advice of your donation with your contact details for the acknowledgement and tax receipt, if needed.

Acknowledgement of contributions

All contributions to the Forum will be acknowledged by the Forum.

Tax deductions

Donations to the Forum are tax deductible and on request we will issue a receipt for your tax purposes.

CONTACT DETAILS

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To join our mailing list, send your email address to the co-ordinator.