



## **The Plettenberg Bay Community Environment Forum:** **A Seismic Journey Over 25 Years**

**The Forum is appealing to all the residents of Plett to become involved; join a meeting, attend a protest, raise your voices when necessary and to donate what you can annually, for our environment.**



John Stuart Mill, 1867 said:

*„Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing.“*

**Here's why ....**

## Introduction:

Much of what we know today has been learned through trial and error. Generally, it is our mistakes that teach us so much. What we have learned from the past must inform how we shape our future. Plett's future.

South Africa's financial situation is dire. Government finances are stretched and require that we, as communities, step in. Gone are the days, globally, when communities can sit back and know that their interests are being represented.



For over 30 years, informed experts, engineers and scientists have fought against environmental degradation. It is becoming increasingly apparent that environmental matters are, in fact, human and animal rights violations – especially for future generations. Decisions and choices are being made that are contrary to the well-being of our earth – and to ourselves. Amidst the information overload, often contradictory, we're not sure, at times, what's right, what's wrong and what is unknown. Inherently as humans we do though know and we need to listen to those inner voices, as well as the science. **It will take more than science and good management to get us beyond the challenges we now face.**

Gus Speth, a renowned environmental lawyer and advocate said, *"I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy ... and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation."*



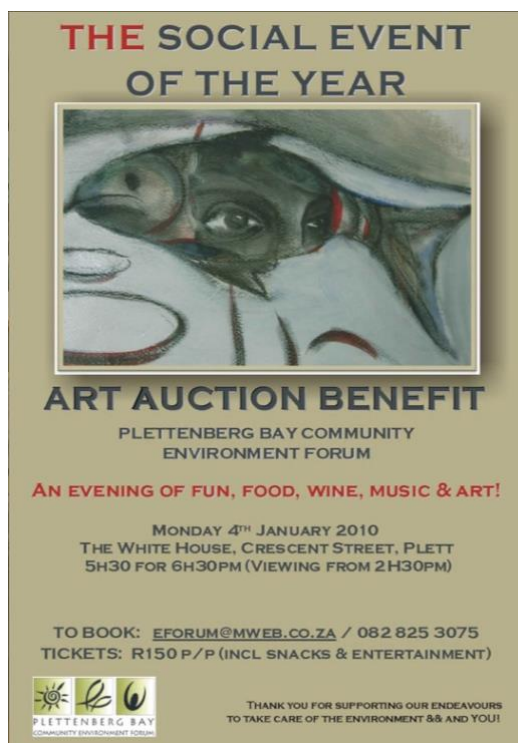
We are nature and the longer we take to acknowledge this, the sooner we face more damage to our lives and the lives of our families and communities.

Plett is a magnet to us all ... and its allure lies in its nature and it's that nature that feeds us both physically and mentally:

- functioning and healthy habitats,
- a tourism economy built on Plett's nature,
- clean water,
- fisheries,
- indigenous plants,
- indigenous wildlife and
- communities that care and do appreciate all of these natural treasures.

Plett's nature is everyone's asset .... from health and well-being to property values and lifestyles. Plett ranks right up there on the "best place to be" list.

### **History and Gains of the PBCEF:**



The Plett Environment Forum has been in operation for over 25 years - this in itself is an incredible achievement. Going back in time, Plett became fashionable ... and the place to be. We all know why. But, that meant increased development, increased pressure on resources. Concerned residents and organisations got together and formed the Plettenberg Bay Community Environment Forum to monitor development applications, to participate in environmental processes and to influence decisions affecting Plett's environment. There was an active steering committee, an appointed Legal Consultant and a wider committee who attended monthly meetings. It was vibrant, active and happening. The Forum did, and still does, actively participate in the development of Spatial Development Frameworks – the legally required planning outlines for future development in Bitou.



## Development Trends:

2005 .....

In about 2005, the golf course boom arrived, closely followed by the contentious of the polo field developments. This raged for several years: water use, pesticides, changing land use, EIA's with questionable rationales and activities .... it read like "The Green Godfather". The Forum took this on and its influence was astounding. In between all of this were other development applications, discussions about water and water use, forests, fynbos.



Next came vineyards. These were less ominous, lower water use, but again vast swathes of land that were to be transformed from nature to vines. The use of pesticides and run-off into rivers was concerning.

2012 .....



In 2012 the application for the Small Boat Harbour raised alarms. There had been rumblings for some time but what was presented seemed more like a Harbour Village – It included the actual harbor, accommodation, shops, restaurants and an end to Central Beach as we know it, with massive environmental impacts and, again, the rationale was questionable.

This sparked a flurry of Forum activity and years of ongoing discussions, meetings, ... and still these rumblings continue.

The developers' strategy over much of this time was to punt job creation. In this way developers hoped to get the buy-in from communities. And yes, we agreed, jobs were – and are – vital.

However, inappropriate developments, could ultimately harm livelihoods and Plett's economic basis – tourism which relies on our environment. It's all very well to "pave paradise" and build a hotel, creating jobs and so on. But when paradise is paved, Plett just becomes like any other well paved destination and the key thing that separates us from others is lost. And then what?

2017 .....



In 2017 the Southern Cape went up in flames. It was a time of terror, of horror. Fireballs flew across gorges, engulfing homes and towns. Flames were fueled by the oils of invasive plants (pines, eucalypts, wattle) and senescent fynbos. Lives were lost, homes were destroyed and people's lives were turned upside down. And yet, less than 10 years later .... have you seen our wattle? Our gums? Our Pines?

Communities came together. It was shown that we are adaptable. We have intelligence. We CAN have understanding and we have choices. This gives hope – for our own rewilding and reconnection to each other and to our nature.

2019 .....

Next on our timeline was ... Macadamias, almonds, avocados and lifestyle farms – all water dependent. This began trending just prior to Covid. With Covid and "work from home" options being recognised, many flocked to smaller coastal towns. Living closer to nature and changing lifestyles has become possible. The resulting gain for Plett was soaring property prices, the need for more housing, schools and resources. Boom time has the potential, again, to alter the face of Plett.







This is a map from the Petroleum Agency of SA. It shows the blocks around our coastline where there is oil and gas abstraction either planned, happening or exploratory drilling and seismic testing to take place.

Plettenberg Bay's waters have been targeted. Despite whale migrations, fishery spawning grounds, Marine Protected Areas and so much more, two applications are currently in play.

The first was from Total Energies to pump gas from 6 wells to be drilled in a 12 000 square km block, and install a pipeline on the seabed 120km long to Mossel Bay. The second was from CGG to conduct seismic surveys across an area of 12 750 square kms offshore of Plett and St Francis, blasting 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for 5 months. One Marine Protected Area is within the block. These applications are being made for a marine hotspot that is also:

- Part of a UNESCO registered biosphere reserve
- A Hope Spot with Mission Blue and recognised by the famous Sylvia Earle
- A Whale Heritage Site, recognised by the Global Cetacean Alliance
- Home to 5 Marine Protected Areas
- An Ecologically or Biologically Significant Marine Area (EBSA)
- A Critical Biodiversity Area

The Forum rallied the community, coordinated a protest march, assisted by The Green Connection, which garnered national supported. Plett's community stood up and stood firm. Objections and appeals were submitted to the Minister and politicians.

On the 18<sup>th</sup> February 2025, just days ago, we received a notice for a new public participation process regarding another Draft Scoping Report for gas exploration in larger areas along our coast, with public meetings scheduled in Plettenberg Bay on March 13, 2025, at New Horizons Community Hall from 15h00 – 19h00: <https://www.slrconsulting.com/public-documents/11b12bsurveys/>





## Current Times:

This is just a micro-picture of what Plett has faced. Currently, there are over 7 350 new residential units planned for construction in the coming years. Each home requires water, waste management, electricity, land. People need schools, hospitals and roads. The pressure on our pristine spaces, rivers, forests, and natural spaces is mounting. It's frightening for Plett – and all it encompasses - our communities, our nature, our well-being.

The Keurbooms River, at the pump station, is tiny. Nothing like what is seen from the N2. At times it is merely a trickle. For years there have been discussion about building a dam to catch water during high flow periods. This makes sense. However, there are geological challenges. Ground water exists but it serves an ecological function, slowly replenishing rivers.

## The Future:



Every growing town needs an environmental forum. We cannot leave the future of our environment, on which so many of us depend for livelihoods, for sense of place, for health and well-being, to be hijacked by any corruption, extractive business and a disregard for environmental law that is there to protect wildlife, ecology and in particular us and our children's children.

The Plett Environmental Forum is unique. It brings together experts, champions, scientists, engineers, ecologists, environmental lawyers, conservationists, business people and committed citizens. It keeps political forces in check, no matter who they are. It relies on the law, on public engagement, it adheres to principles that have proven to guide and ensure healthy futures for all. It is a watchdog and an important space for dialogue and action. To strengthen its legacy of environmental protection in our town and the broader Bitou municipality, we must build the next generation of environmental custodians, and become even more engaged as residents.

We need **YOU** - all the people of Plett to support, fund and get involved with the forum, securing and sustaining your current investments in Plett - be that your property, your business, your well-being.

The forum needs three things:

1. **A strong Environmental Forum Steering Committee** – to coordinate efforts, write reports, comments and track what is going on in our environment. The committee needs help and there is strength in numbers. There are so many new people in Plett. We need your knowledge, your eyes, your problem-solving skills, your vision for a Plett that we all love.

2. **Ongoing funding** – With Plett’s population in the tens of thousands, we need just 1,000 families or individuals to donate R500 a year to keep up the good work. We are a registered NPO with Section 18A status (tax deductions are possible). You can sign up and pledge your support or set up a monthly debit order at R42 per month – the cost just 1.5 coffees.
3. **And lastly we need every resident of Bitou** – to promote and champion environmental issues and healthy ecosystems, be those the forests, the sea dunes, our river mouths, the lagoon or the open ocean of the bay. We are so privileged to live surrounded by national parks and regional reserves, but they all depend on intact connectivity around them and sound land management. We have great legislation in our country that guides our collective task to ensure that our habitats remain healthy. More than this, we actively must rewild, restore, reconnect and retain the environment we already have – as a united community of Bitou. We need to network, to collaborate to work together. And sometimes to agree to disagree.

### **Projects :**

The Forum has two proactive projects ready to launch and one in the pipeline:

**The Plett Nature Park** aims to become a small botanical nature area. It is on public land situated behind Barrington and along a stream that goes up towards the top of Robberg Road.

**The Plett Estuarine Park** will establish a buffer along the estuary from Lookout Nature Reserve and around the estuary to Gansevelei. It will involve education, monitoring and accessibility.



And what is a priority – and SO important to our water needs, fire protection needs and that feeds job creation – is alien plant management.

- Increased water flows
- Water resources managed
- Jobs created
- Small industries created



Studies have shown that the removal of invasive plants in areas has resulted in dried up rivers beginning to flow again.

In the Western Cape, available water resources have been reduced by 15%. One research paper states that, “if no action is taken, water losses could double in only two decades to 100 billion litres per year”.

The job and industry opportunities that are so vital from the by-product of alien removals present potential income streams. Research is underway into the potential bioenergy that may be generated through the use of by-products from alien clearing. With development support, small industries are possible using aliens: school desks, coffins, ceiling board, biochar, parquet flooring, fire wood ... and so on. This needs more and urgent investigation.

The Plettenberg Bay Community Environment Forum will provide Section 18a tax certificates for donations received

**Account name:** Plett Environment Forum

**Bank:** Standard Bank of South Africa

**Branch:** Plettenberg Bay

**Branch code:** 050714

**Account number:** 1868 6150 8

**PROOF OF PAYMENT:** [info@plettenvironmentalforum.co.za](mailto:info@plettenvironmentalforum.co.za)

Please send the coordinator ([info@plettenvironmentalforum.co.za](mailto:info@plettenvironmentalforum.co.za)) an email advising us of your donation with your contact details and requesting a tax certificate

***\*Use your name as a reference\****