

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE FERNKLOOF NATURE RESERVE (FNR)
ADVISORY BOARD (FAB) HELD AT FERNKLOOF, HERMANUS
ON THURSDAY, 8 MARCH 2012**

1. Attendance and Apologies

Present: Mr D Heard (in the Chair); Mr D Beattie, Mr A van Hoogstraten, Mr F Woodvine, Mrs L Griffiths, Mrs L Burman, Dr Muthama Muasya, Mr G Forbes (Cape Nature)

Apologies: Councillor P Scholtz, Dr V Hamilton-Attwell; Mr A Marais (Cape Nature)

In attendance: Ms L Bezuidenhout (Environmental Manager, Overstrand); Ms P Aplon (Environmental Officer, Hermanus); Mr N Green (Environmental Officer, Kleinmond), Ms Jill Hendriks (PA, Onrus Office).

Before opening the meeting the Chairperson welcomed Grant Forbes as an official representative of Cape Nature and noted that he (Chairperson) would request CapeNature to appoint Grant to FAB in addition to Mr Andrae Marais. Grant's knowledge of FNR would provide a measure of institutional knowledge continuity. His involvement too with the management of nearby CapeNature reserves in combination with Andrae's knowledge of conservation issues in the district could assist FAB significantly.

The Chairperson also welcomed Ms Jill Hendriks, PA to Liezl Bezuidenhout, who would be trained to take over as Secretary. He thanked Liezl for taking care of the FAB secretariat issue.

2. Confirmation of Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of a meeting of the Fernkloof Advisory board held on 10 November 2011 be confirmed.

Matters Arising

2.1 Item 3.10: **The Hermanus Astronomy Centre (HAC) Proposal for the Development of an Astronomy Education Centre and Observatory (AECO) on FNR.**

It was agreed to deal with this item ahead of other items on the agenda.

The Chairperson presented a draft recommendation to Council on this matter to FAB for their input and approval. This was as a result of a Special Meeting of FAB held with members of the Hermanus Astronomy Centre on Tuesday, 6 March 2012 at which they had presented their proposal for an AECO opposite the view site on Rotary Way.

FAB discussed the proposal at length and in detail and based on the points raised in Appendix 1 (a summary of the issues discussed and commented on at the HAC meeting) unanimously resolved to support the following recommendation to Council:

FAB RECOMMENDATION TO COUNCIL – 2012 (1) :

Although it is envisaged that the AECO project would be of significant benefit to the Overstrand Community and is supported in-principle, FAB cannot presently support the siting and development of the AECO on FNR.

The proposal is premature as the following statutory planning processes for FNR have not been completed. These planning processes are intended to guide and inform the process of decision-making in terms of the management and development of FNR:

1. An approved FNR Management Plan that complies with the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act and its latest Regulations, is not in place. In accordance with this Act, the Management Plan must contain a Zonation Plan, Management Policy Framework Guidelines and a Concept Development Plan that has been subject to an appropriate public participation process.
2. An appropriate biodiversity assessment of the site and associated ecological processes which will provide a sensitivity analysis of the site undertaken by a professional scientist approved by CapeNature (Overstrand SDF requirement).
3. An holistic, Site Development Plan for this FNR Development Node (look-out point and parking area on Rotary Drive) that is in accordance with the FNR Management Plan Objectives and Policy Guidelines as well as the above scientific study (2) which should aim to reduce the impacts (but not necessarily numbers) of tourists and others users of the area. In this way, uncoordinated *ad hoc* development in the reserve is avoided.
4. An Environmental Management Plan to guide any authorised development construction on FNR under the supervision of an independent Environmental Control officer (Normal practice with development in nature reserves and National Parks).

The above processes will conform with statutory requirements and will greatly assist in determining the appropriateness of any proposed development at the site and protecting the landscape character as well as the integrity of the natural environment surrounding the site.

FAB rejects in the strongest terms the statement in the HAC ‘Comments on Objections’ report which states on Page 5 - “To delay an application of this nature because the requisite statutory obligations have not been fulfilled is indefensible...”. This statement is misguided and grossly irresponsible especially since the proposal is for an *ad hoc* development within one of the most sensitive areas of a globally important nature reserve that has one of the highest botanical species densities in South Africa and the world (1 100 species in 1 800 ha or 0.6 species/ha). By comparison, the Kogelberg Nature Reserve, the recognised core area within the Kogelberg Biosphere Reserve – a global fynbos ‘hotspot of species density’ has 1 654 species in 18 000 ha or 0.092 species/ha)

FAB also strongly rejects the HAC ‘Conclusion’ on the last page “*With due consideration having been given to ALL arguments verbalized in the objections to the proposed lease agreement, the HAC respectfully submits that its application has rationally addressed all the issues raised therein and as such represents the fact-based best option for the location of the AECO*”. The HAC response does not present a convincing argument as it failed to address all issues satisfactorily (refer to Appendix 1) especially the statutory obligations, various design criteria as well as the fact it has not even started formulating an Operational Business Plan which would test the proposal for sustainability.

The Chairperson was thanked for his efforts in this regard.

A number of additional points were made by members:

- The site proposed for the AECO – which had been disturbed during the Eskom power line installation some years back and was now presently rehabilitating well.
- Any construction on and /or disturbance of the site would open up the way for invasion by invasive alien vegetation through roots or seeds being imported into the area with building materials.
- The newest AECO proposal included the construction a wall to act as a ‘human sundial’ along the nearest vehicle track, intended to prevent human trampling through the veld. This structure in itself would increase the development footprint significantly and would also create a sun, wind and rain shadow for metres either side which would change the nature of the adjoining vegetation.
- That although the facility had been carefully designed to avoid the necessity of a full EIA by a small margin, the Municipality had a duty to exercise “due care” when considering applications which could have severe environmental impacts.

2.2 Item 3.1: Letters of Appointment

Andrae Marais to be reminded to send a copy of his letter of appointment to Council.
Grant Forbes to forward his as well once it was approved by CapeNature.

2.3 Item 3.3: Circulation of Minutes to Council

Liezl Bezuidenhout reported that she had now arranged that the FAB Minutes would be submitted via her to her Director, Stephen Muller, and from there to the relevant Portfolio Committee. Copies of the minutes would thus form part of the Council Public Documentation available at the Library.

David Beattie would ensure that relevant items were also brought to the attention of the Ward Committee (Ward 3) of which he was a member.

2.4 Item 3.2: FAB Portfolio of Information

This had been completed and was circulated to all FAB members by Grant Forbes. The environmental staff were thanked for their efforts in this regard.

2.5 Item 3.5: By-laws relating to the Advisory Board

It was noted that new regulations were mooted by the Protected Areas Act and that these might need to be taken into consideration. Neville Green to follow up.

Liezl reported on a proposed re-structuring of the Environmental Department in which a new appointment of Biodiversity Manager would be made. This person would have

ultimate responsibility for management of Fernkloof but also the entire Overstrand Municipal Area.

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A Senior Field Ranger would be appointed, who would act as Asst. Fernkloof Manager and there would be an addition two Field Rangers.

These positions would be advertised in the new financial year. In the meantime Neville Green would be responsible for legal matters and the Management Plan and Penelope Aplon would assist with the operational side, alien vegetation, paths etc. and supervise the activities of the Field Ranger.

The Board recorded its appreciation to Liezl for her efforts in this regard.

2.6 Item 3.6: FAB Secretariat

Liezl informed FAB the her Administrative Assistant, Jill Hendriks would to take over the Secretarial function once she (Jill) had become accustomed to the workings of the FAB.

NOTED with thanks.

2.7 Item 3.7: Invitation to Mayor to attend FAB meeting

In view of the fact that the date of this meeting had been changed, Duncan Heard had not sent out an invitation to the Mayor until he could confirm that all subsequent meeting dates would remain the same. He would send the Mayor a list of the dates of further meetings for the year so that she could choose a date which suited her schedule.

2.8 Item 3.8: FNR Management Plan

Liezl Bezuidenhout and Neville Green had visited the consultants the previous week for initial discussions. It had been agreed that the first public information session would be held prior to 12 May and it would be important to establish the stakeholder base as soon as possible. The assurance was given that FAB and Botsoc members would be consulted and kept fully informed.

The Chairperson expressed the hope that the resultant document would be user-friendly and serve as a genuine base for management decisions by staff members.

2.9 Item 3.11: Grotto Picnic Area

David Beattie said that part of the Ward 3 Budget included provision of a portion of cliff path around the edge of the Grotto and removal of the braais. However the restoration of the wetland necessitated an EIA or at least a Basic Assessment which implied that there would not be time to spend the funds in this financial year.

Liezl Bezuidenhout undertook to give the matter some thought to see if part of the work could be linked to other proposed development work at Grotto Beach, thus freeing up funds for the path section of the work.

2.10 Item 3.14: Dumping at Hoy's Koppie

Regarding law enforcement, David Beattie said there had been numerous changes in HPP management and the CPMG would be setting up a meeting to see if various problems could be ironed out. Liezl Bezuidenhout asked that a member of the Environmental Section be included in the meeting. Linda Griffiths requested that she also be present.

The Chairperson stated that the whole issue of ineffective law enforcement needed to be looked at. Particular problem areas appeared to be illegal dumping and control of dogs.

Neville Green mentioned that Working for the Coast also had funding available for monitors but that no programme was in place yet.

3. Administration

3.1 Management Reports

Penelope Aplon said that she had submitted her report on Fernkloof to Liezl Bezuidenhout. The latter apologised for have failed to circulate the report and promised to do so.

4. Standing Items

4.1 Ecological Issues

4.1.1 Keurboom (Virgilia) Distribution and Status

Grant Forbes promised to forward his final report to the Chairperson for circulation.

4.1.2 Dewpond Path

At the last meeting FAB had resolved that the 'Dew Pond' path should not be re-opened as it was poorly aligned and and passed through a number of steep wetland seeps. Since then and after further representations from a small group of regular hikers at Fernkloof, the Chairperson, accompanied by Grant Forbes, had done a further ecological assessment of the path in question. This assessment re-affirmed FAB's recommendation that it should not be maintained. His report is attached per Appendix 2.

Linda Griffiths and David Beattie had been approached individually by the hiker group as they were apparently still not satisfied with the decision.

RECOMMENDED that the Board stand by its original decision and that no further debate on the subject be entertained and that if that particular group wanted to make further representations, they needed to submit them to the Director's office.

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It was noted that the hiking trail system and its maintenance would form part of the Policy Framework of the Management Plan.

4.2 Research/Event Applications

4.2.1 *Quantum Adventures*

Application is made for a two-day Berg and Beach Tail run with up to 200 participants. Day 1 starts at De Kelders and ends at Fernkloof (beach section cleared with Cape Nature) and day 2 involves 27 km of trails in Fernkloof, starting and ending at the Botanical Centre.

This event has been held for the past two years, with no noticeable negative effects; however, there had never been as many as 200 participants.

RECOMMENDED that the event be approved, subject to the number of participants being limited to 150.

4.2.2 *The Ride*

Permission is sought for a group of 14 riders to traverse Fernkloof, entering from the property of Anthony Hamilton-Russell, along portion of the Jeep Track and traversing the Reserve via Elephant Path and the southern boundary behind the houses, crossing the Mossel River and following the firebreak behind Voëlklip. The function would receive television coverage and could hold benefits for the Reserve.

Reservations were expressed (a) for the safety of horses and riders on the steep and unstable portions of Elephant Path and (b) the desirability of horses, which could introduce foreign seed via hooves and excrement, in a nature reserve of this type.

After thorough discussion and assurances by management that steps could and would be taken to mitigate any ill-effects, it was RECOMMENDED that the Ride be permitted on this occasion with increased TV exposure on the importance of the Fernkloof Nature Reserve. It was, however, recommended that the route through the Mossel River be changed in consultation with reserve management.

Any further applications would be considered after the effects of this event had been assessed.

4.2.3 *Whale Coast Conservation Walk*

Application is made for a "Walking for Water" walk along the cliff path from the New Harbour to the Old Harbour on Wednesday, 21 March 2012.

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This would be a joint effort between Whale Coast Conservation and the OSM Environmental Section and the normal fees would be waived.

RECOMMENDED that the application be approved.

4.3 Klein River Estuary Management

No further meetings of KREF had been held. Linda Griffiths read a letter received from Mrs Corrie Lucas of Voelklip, (which also appeared in the Hermanus Times) appealing to the public to make their voices heard by every means possible in order to prioritise conservation issues, and the importance of the Klein River Estuary in particular, in connection with the update of the Spatial Development Framework currently being undertaken.

4.4 Report from the Hermanus Botanical Society

Lee Burman reported that the Society planned to hold a mini Flower Show (specimens only) over the Easter Weekend, to coincide with its annual Plant Sale. Teas and light lunches would be available.

She also expressed disappointment that a request by Charlyn Vosloo for financial assistance for the hack group she has been running for the past few years, could not be entertained due to lack of funds. The wonderful work done by Charlyn and her group in keeping the fringes of the reserve free of alien pest plants (a job which had previously been undertaken by the Botanical Society itself) was deserving of whatever support could be offered.

4.4.1 *Galpin Hut*

Duncan Heard reported that he had visited the Galpin Hut for the first time and that in his opinion the state of Galpin Hut did no credit to the Reserve. Liezl Bezuidenhout shared this opinion. She felt that there should be closer co-operation between the Botanical Society, that manages the hut and Environmental Management and had spoken to Pat Miller (Chairperson, Botsoc) about this.

Lee Burman mentioned that she had received a report from the last person to use the hut (a local resident) and had reported to the Botsoc Committee that the toilet building needed repair and that new mattresses were needed. Apart from those items, the person concerned had felt that the hut was in a sound condition.

The Chairperson reiterated that any nature reserve accommodation unit, albeit one of a rustic nature, needed to meet certain minimum standards and must be aesthetically

acceptable in the landscape. He asked FAB members and the Environmental management section to consider the matter of the Galpin Hut so that recommendations could be made in this connection at the next meeting.

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4.5 Report from the Cliff Path Management Group

David Beattie reported that, owing to the poor quality of work done by some tenderers in the past, it had been agreed that the successful tenderer for the current maintenance contract would have to complete a test section first before the award of the tender is confirmed.

He also stated that alien clearing is on-going under supervision of Frank Woodvine.

The Board noted with thanks the contribution of the CPMG and Frank Woodvine in particular, for the ongoing control of alien vegetation along the cliff path area.

5. General

5.1 Renewal of Lease Agreement: Scout Camp

Antony van Hoogstraten requested the Board's support for an application by the Scout Camp Committee for a renewal of their lease of the Scout Camp for a further period of 9 years and 11 months. The Scout Camp had been operating on this site for 100 years.

RECOMMENDED that the lease be renewed accordingly.

The poor state of the road leading down to the Scout Camp and the eroded and overgrown access from the parking area to the lagoon was mentioned. Lee Burman undertook to send photos to Liezl Bezuidenhout to illustrate the point. This was noted and Penelope Aplon would give this some attention.

5.2 Vervet Monkeys in the area

Antony van Hoogstraten reported that on two occasions he had seen vervet monkeys close to the Reserve, once in the Hemel & Aarde Valley near Camphill School and once on the R43 near Cilla's Stables.

RECOMMENDED that management give some thought to a policy to deal with these potential problem animals should the threat materialise. It was uncertain at this stage whether range expansion was taking place or whether these were isolated cases - Grant Forbes was requested to obtain an opinion from CapeNature.

5.3 Provincial By-pass Road

David Beattie stated that this road was indicated on some planning maps had been discussed at the last Ward 3 Committee meeting. It was RECOMMENDED that the status of planning for this road be referred to the Provincial Government via Grant Forbes

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5.4 Coastal Setback Lines

Liezl Bezuidenhout informed the meeting that the municipality was involved in a process with the Provincial Administration in determining Coastal Setback Lines for the Overstrand which would take into account projected 20, 50 and 100 year sea level rises. Once determined, these lines would be included in the Overstrand Spatial Development Framework and would have implications for coastal development. This exercise is being undertaken in terms of the Integrated Coastal Management Act. A Stakeholder Participation Process will be run over the next few months and will assist the authorities to determine the 20, 50 and 100 year development lines.

5.5 Paths and Parking areas within 100m of the sea

Liezl Bezuidenhout had been requested to submit information about the existing and envisaged construction of all coastal paths and parking areas to the Provincial Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning in terms of Environmental Management Act. Any changes or new work on existing coastal paths should therefore firstly be referred to her. New paths would not be allowed to proceed without the necessary Provincial Authority to do so.

It was noted that the Hermanus section of the cliff path had originally been constructed prior to 1960. Lee Burman offered to check old Botanical Society minute books to see if any further information was recorded.

5.6 Public Toilets

It was noted that the public toilets at Fernkloof had been vandalised and would hereafter be locked at night.

6. Dates of Future Meetings

May 18

August 17

November 23

The meeting closed at 12.45

CHAIRPERSON

Date

SPECIAL MEETING OF THE FERNKLOOF NATURE RESERVE ADVISORY BOARD

6 March 2012 at 15:30
at
Fernkloof Nature Reserve

Attended By:

FAB Members: Duncan Heard (Chair), David Beattie (Vice-Chair), Lee Burman, Frank Woodvine, Antony van Hoogstraten and Linda Griffiths.

Botanical Society: Pat Miller (invited by FAB)

Overstrand Environmental Management Section: Liezl Bezuidenhout, Penelope Aplon and Neville Green

Apologies: **FAB Members:** Andrae Marais, Muthama Muasya and Vic Hamilton-Attwell

CONSIDERATION OF HERMANUS ASTRONOMY CENTRE (HAC) PROPOSAL FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN ASTRONOMY EDUCATION CENTRE AND OBSERVATORY (AECO) ON FERNKLOOF NATURE RESERVE (FNR) BY THE FERNKLOOF NATURE RESERVE ADVISORY BOARD (FAB)

1. The HAC had been invited by the Overstrand Municipality to give a presentation on the above proposal to FAB. Four HAC members attended and Mr. Pierre de Villiers from the HAC presented the proposal. After the presentation FAB and Botanical Society members present asked questions for clarification and provided relevant information to the discussion. What follows is a brief summary of some of the issues raised.
2. It was stressed that FAB supported the AECO project in-principle and that they were of the opinion that it would be of great benefit to the Overstrand Community. The question for consideration however was whether the HAC's preferred site at the view point at the end of Rotary Drive on FNR was acceptable in terms of the applicable legislative framework as well as the ecological integrity and landscape character of this part of the nature reserve.

3. Legislative Framework

Although FNR is situated on Overstrand Municipal Property, it is a declared Nature Reserve and therefore various provisions of the following legislation will be applicable to it:

- National Environmental Management Act (No 107 of 1998) [NEMA] - *Environmental Management Principles e.g. Precautionary principle.*
- Western Cape Province - Cape Nature and Environmental Conservation Ordinance (No 19 of 1974) [Ordinance] - *Original proclamation, powers and duties of management authority, FAB, oversight authority to CapeNature and*

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relevant Western Cape Minister – they must agree with the management and development of the reserve.

- National Environment Management: Protected Areas Act (No 57 of 2003) [NEMPAA] - *FNR is a Nature Reserve in terms of this Act which governs the establishment and management of such nature reserves. It also requires the compilation of a management plan which must inter alia have a zonation plan and management framework for each reserve.*
- NEMPAA: Regulations for the Proper Administration of Nature Reserves (Gov. Notice 35021 of 2012 dated 8 February 2012) [NEMPAA Regulations] - Chapter 2 and Section 4(1) states *“The management authority may in managing the nature reserve... (e) carry out any development and construct or erect any infrastructure necessary for the management of a nature reserve, subject to an environmental authorization in terms of section 24 of National Environmental Management Act and the management plan;*
- The Fynbos sub-veld type, Overberg Sandstone Fynbos has also just recently been declared as a Critically Endangered Ecosystem in terms of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act; and
- The Overstrand Municipal Wide Spatial Development Framework on page 24 (SPC 2.7) specifically requires that before a development in a Core 1 area is considered, that *“a full botanical assessment should be carried out by a specialist botanist approved by the Land Use Advisory Unit of CapeNature”*

The HAC were in agreement that their proposal be subject to the applicable legislation and be supported by an approved management plan for the nature reserve.

4. Ecological integrity and Landscape Character

The developed node at the lookout point on Rotary Drive as well as the associated gravel tracks and other ‘informal’ lookout points have severely impacted the biodiversity, natural environment and landscape character of this ecologically sensitive mountain-top area of FNR. Furthermore no holistic botanical and ecological assessment studies has been undertaken of this area over all seasons and of various the veld age classifications. It is clearly evident that the present road and lookout points are in a poor condition and their impacts need to be reduced through firstly undertaking a thorough biodiversity and ecological study of the natural environment here. Based on this information, appropriate development planning would determine what the most suitable visitor facilities could be sustainably placed here to cater for visitors to this point. This must take into account not only upgrading but importantly the reduction of the present impact footprints while allowing possibly for a greater capacity of visitors. *Ad hoc* development without a holistic site plan that will address all the above issues would be inappropriate and extremely unwise. The matter of access control as well as visitor and infrastructure security together with adequate management resources are matters that must also be addressed with this planning.

The HAC agreed that a thorough ecological and biodiversity study of the site must be undertaken.

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5. Funding and Operational Business Plan for AECO Project.

To questions in this regard the HAC informed FAB that they estimated the capital development cost at R3,5 million which they were confident they could raise from donors. No development funds would be requested from the Overstrand Municipality. They had not developed an Operational Financial Business Plan as yet. FAB commented that the additional capacity and others costs for Reserve Management also needed to be factored in placing an additional financial burden on the Reserve Management Budget.

6. Parking

The HAC were of the opinion that the parking area would generally be sufficient for their needs during evening meetings and for small school groups (max 30 at a time) but also mooted that the parking area should be upgraded. FAB were concerned about congestion at the parking area when many tourists visit the lookout site.

7. Services

The HAC confirmed that they will have water brought in and stored in tanks placed in the AECO berms, solar panels on the northern side for electricity and they would require a conservancy tank for sewage which will be pumped by the Municipality.

8. Fire

The HAC confirmed that they would require no firebreaks or -belts as that the AECO would be so constructed and insulated to allow a wildfire to sweep over and past the centre without causing damage.

9. AECO Planted Berms

It was the HAC's intention to harmonise the centre into the surrounding landscape by surrounding it with a berm on which indigenous plants were to be established. FAB members expressed their concern about the 'alien soil' that would have to be brought in to establish the berm both from a chemical perspective (and its effect on surrounding vegetation) and as a carrier of invasive alien vegetation seed. They were also of the opinion that it would be almost impossible to propagate and successfully establish local site indigenous vegetation on all sides of the berm. Different genetic plant material needed to be avoided at all costs. Irrigation of such berms would disturb the natural regime of the mountain-top vegetation. The associated Sundial Wall would furthermore significantly cause a change in the vegetation surrounding the structure.

FAB also remain unconvinced that trampling around the centre would be eliminated

10. Alternative Sites

FAB members accentuated the point that they were not convinced that enough research had been undertaken in looking at alternative sites and especially that of Anthony Hamilton-Russell who had expressed himself in favour of the AECO being developed on his property. If this remained an option, it would give the HAC more certainty on the project as there would be less public participation processes required as well as less site

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planning processes. This could very possibly speed up the project implementation phase. The HAC were requested to give serious consideration to this.

The HAC noted this request.

11. New Daytime Focus on Astronomy Education

FAB noted the HAC's new main focus on Daytime Education and therefore ask the question why the site was selected based on the minimal amount of light 'pollution'. The siting would then only mainly benefit HAC members and associates using the telescopes at night!

12. Objections Received

Twenty-four objections had been received from organisations and individuals against the proposed lease of a portion of FNR for the development of the AECO. The most noteworthy from CapeNature, the Provincial oversight authority for Local Authority Nature Reserves, the Wildlife and Environment Society of Southern Africa (WESSA) and our local Whale Coast Conservation (OCF). The common theme of these objections, based on legislative requirements, was that no decision could be made until a Management Plan (that condoned such a development) had been drawn up for FNR (including a public participation process) and had been approved by the Provincial Minister for Environmental Affairs and Development Planning.

Copy of the contents of an e-mail sent to Robin Richards on 11 January 2012 by the Chairperson.

Dear Robin and Almero

Thank you both for your interest in Fernkloof Nature Reserve (FNR) and for submitting your inputs regarding the closing of the footpath linking Aasvoelkop with the Galpin intersection. Public and user input are always welcomed and will be considered.

Robin contacted me a while ago about this matter and I confirmed that the Fernkloof Advisory Board (FAB) and the Overstrand Environmental Management officials had unanimously agreed that this particular section of path should be closed. When Robin provided me with various reasons for not closing the path, I undertook to personally visit and evaluate the area as I have only been a FAB member for almost a year and had not seen the area in question. I also undertook to place the item before FAB at its next meeting in February 2012, if I was of the opinion that the proposal to keep this section of path open could be pursued.

I must also just give you some background on the FAB. It is a statutory Board “for the purpose of advising and making recommendations to the municipality in connection with the management, control and development of such reserve”. FAB presently consists of 10 appointed voluntary members and includes an official from CapeNature, a Botsoc member and others that have either a sound knowledge of the reserve or have extensive botanical and environmental management qualifications and/or experience. In my case, I have followed a 40 year career in environmental management and inter alia specialised in nature reserve planning and management as well as trail construction and maintenance both on Western Cape nature reserves and in the uKhahlamba Drakensberg Park World Heritage Site in KwaZulu-Natal.

It must also be said that for many years the footpaths on FNR have not been properly maintained and that Grant Forbes has now started an excellent maintenance process that will, in the long term ensure that the footpaths do not cause erosion and that they are safe and comfortable to walk on. Trails and footpaths in nature reserves should be appropriately placed and designed in such a way that their ecological impact (even when used heavily) is kept to a minimum and therefore they must be robust and well constructed in order to minimise the need for frequent costly maintenance.

I visited the site on 22nd December with Grant Forbes. My findings are as follows:

- 1. Generally the path in question is poorly aligned up steep slopes and crosses many sensitive wetland seeps and should clearly not have been constructed along this route in the first place.*
- 2. The path camber (the angle of the cross section of the path) over long distances is too steep (more than 2° from horizontal) which makes for uncomfortable walking and slipping.*
- 3. Trail sagging is evident at places with the outer edge of the path being fragile and tending to break away.*
- 4. Along certain sections, the path surface (tread width) is less than 50 cm wide which is uncomfortable.*

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5. *The path surface is generally coarse sand subject to water seeping diagonally through an over it at wet times of the year which makes it vulnerable to erosion with even a minimal amount of use.*
6. *Vegetation is starting to grow in the path again stabilising the path surface and preventing further erosion.*
7. *Aesthetically with this old path overgrown, it is no longer impacting the natural visual landscape.*

From the above observations, I must conclude that this section of path is undesirable both from an ecological (erodibility and impact on sensitive wetland areas) as well as hiker safety and comfort (path slope, path sagging, slippery/ wet areas) perspectives. In order to prevent/mitigate the problems identified, one would have to effect significant and costly 'cut and fill' measures and introduce numerous water barriers to effectively divert water from the path and prevent erosion. Even if one introduces these measures, I would remain unconvinced that they would be effective over the long term - especially if it is subjected to higher levels of hiker use. Not only would such mitigation measures and maintenance be disproportionately costly, but the visual impact of such an 'upgraded trail' on this exposed southern slope would be unacceptable too.

Although I fully appreciate your group's desire to have a convenient circular hiking route in this part of the reserve, ecological, aesthetic and maintenance considerations must take priority in a nature reserve context. I therefore must stand by the FAB and municipal environmental staff's decision to close this section of path.

Wishing your "Wednesday Walking Group" a wonderful 2012.

Best Wishes

Duncan Heard

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