**For release: 7 August 2025**

**Swartland Municipality**

**Riverlands Dams Disaster – One year later**

On 8 August, we commemorate one year since the calamitous dam disaster devastated the lives of the Riverlands residents. In the early hours of 8 August 2024, the dam wall of one of a series of illegal dams, located on a farm belonging to the National Department of Land Reform and Rural Development, gave way. This resulted in a chain reaction of dams failing, causing a catastrophic flood that washed away people’s homes, animals, and infrastructure, and created immense fear and panic. Thankfully, no loss of life was reported.

The impact of the Riverlands disaster is still evident one year later, and its effects on residents' lives will continue to be felt for years to come. The municipality also suffered losses and damage to infrastructure of approximately R23 million.

Swartland Municipality’s focus has been to repair and restore the damaged municipal infrastructure and services. The municipality has also assisted the community in liaising with other government departments, which at times has proved challenging.

In the immediate aftermath of the disaster, the municipality had to prioritise the repair of essential water infrastructure. The floods washed away all potable water infrastructure, leaving Riverlands and thousands of residents from the greater Chatsworth area without water. **Repairs to the pipe infrastructure were completed in October 2024 at a cost of R6 million.** Swartland Municipality has also ensured that all legal water connections in the area have been restored. A significant amount of work still needs to be done to road and stormwater infrastructure in Riverlands, with a contractor scheduled to be on-site in November 2025. **R9.1 million has been budgeted for these repairs.**

Residents who lost their homes in the flood have been relocated to temporary relocation units provided by the National Department of Human Settlements, and ESKOM has restored some of the electrical connections. There are, however, still residents experiencing challenges with their electrical connections, and although Riverlands is an ESKOM-serviced area, Swartland Municipality has been in continuous contact with ESKOM to pressure them to follow up with their clients.

The Western Cape Provincial Government madefunds available for a flood line study, as well as a study to determine the extent of damage to public and private property. The flood line study has been concluded and shared with the community. However, community leaders have requested an expansion of the study's scope, and this request will now be directed to the Provincial Department of Infrastructure. Meanwhile, the municipality has begun cautioning and raising awareness among residents living below or in the floodplain about potential risks.

As the community marks one year since the disaster, Swartland Municipality remains very aware of its longer-term impact on residents. Many residents lost their sources of income as a direct result of the disaster and are struggling financially. Private property has also been severely damaged. The final report issued by the Department of Water and Sanitation Services in February 2025, concludes that the responsibility for the dams and their failures rests with the property owners, past and present, and that the current owners cannot evade their responsibilities.

As we move forward, Swartland Municipality continues to engage and collaborate with the community and government departments to rebuild public infrastructure and develop the Riverlands community. The project manager, appointed by the Provincial Department of Infrastructure, is assisting the municipality with planning various projects for Riverlands. These projects, however, are all subject to funding availability from National and Provincial Departments and include:

• The repair and upgrade of the sports field in Riverlands. It will cost approximately R9 million to restore the sports field. A business plan has been submitted to the National Department of Sport for the upgrade and repair of the facility.

• A housing project for Riverlands, subject to the funding and land availability, the latter from HDA (Housing Development Agency).

•A socio-economic facility that will greatly benefit the community and create opportunities for residents.

Swartland Municipality continues to meet regularly with Riverlands residents to provide updates and feedback, as well as to advise and gather information. We will continue to assist residents in whatever way we can. Riverlands has faced enormous challenges; however, their fighting spirit and willingness to work together continue to impress. On behalf of the Riverlands community, Swartland Municipality urges all other government stakeholders to honour the commitments made to the community last year. Let’s continue to build back Riverlands, stronger than ever.

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