

Approval of proposed developments within (or in) close proximity to watercourses revised

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Recently, an application to develop a property in Pringle Bay zoned as Residential 1 caused major upheaval since the erf in question was classified as a "watercourse" based on the National Wetland Map 5 (NWM5).

In the case of this application, the Department of Environmental Affairs & Development Planning (DEA&DP) found that since "the greater extent of Erf ***, Pringle Bay is mapped as a channelled valley-bottom wetland", the "Department of Water and Sanitation and/or the relevant catchment management agency must be consulted with respect to development within or within close proximity to a watercourse".

Accordingly, the DEA&DP instructed that an application to develop the property be submitted to the Breede-Gouritz Catchment Management Agency (BGCMA) in accordance with the National Water Act (1998).

The NWA defines a watercourse as:

- "(a) a river or spring;
 - (b) a natural channel in which water flows regularly or intermittently;
 - (c) a wetland, lake or dam into which, or from which, water flows; and
 - (d) any collection of water which the Minister may, by notice in the Gazette, declare to be a watercourse,
- and a reference to a watercourse includes, where relevant, its bed and banks;"

Given the DEA&DP's instruction, Overstrand's Environmental Management Section (EMS) had no option but to request that the owners receive authorisation for the development from the BGCMA prior to approval of the submitted building plans.

Working towards expediting approvals

Overstrand Municipality is all too aware that having to obtain approval from the BGCMA before developments (i.e. building plans) can be approved can cause delays and a lot of frustration, especially since a large percentage of residential erven within the area are classified as wetlands.

In an attempt to speed up the process for approving residential developments within wetlands situated in Overstrand's urban area, the EMS has engaged the BGCMA to determine the way forward.

Thus far it has been established that a professional accredited by the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP) must complete a risk matrix for the proposed development and submit this to the BGCMA. Since EMS officials are not SACNASP accredited, they cannot conduct site visits to verify the presence or absence of a wetland or complete the requisite risk matrix.

To expedite the process when submitting building plans for approval by the responsible authority (in this case the BGCMA), we recommend the following:

- Before submitting plans, determine whether the property is classified as a wetland. Both the DEA&DP and the BGCMA make use of the online mapping program CapeFarmMapper to determine a property's classification. (See instructions below on how to use this program.)
- If the property is classified as a wetland, secure the services of an accredited SACNASP professional to complete the requisite risk matrix.
- To minimise potential risk, submit plans for elevated stilt houses so that water can move freely through the wetland on the property.
- Grass-blocks can be utilised to replace hard surfaces such as access driveways.
- Be sure to include the cubic metre (m³) infill proposed for the development since the BGCMA will require this information in the approval process.

- Also ensure that the plan shows the infill and square meter (m2) coverage for the entire proposed development, including the conservancy tank installation, access driveways, etc.

CapeFarmMapper

This online mapping program is accessible via <https://gis.elsenburg.com/apps/cfm/>

To determine whether the property falls within or within close proximity to a classified wetland or contains a river, turn on the layers. To make sure you are viewing the correct property, turn on the label that shows the erf number by hovering over the area shown in the fourth graph and check the label box.

Breede-Gouritz Catchment Management Agency

For details on the BGCMA, visit <https://breedegouritzcma.co.za/>

Enquiries regarding submissions/approvals can be directed via email to Fabion Smith (fsmith@bgcma.co.za) and Thembela Bushula (tbushula@bgcma.co.za). Please be sure to include both officials in all emails.



