

LAND

Grabouw's 'urgent housing issue' grows

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GRABOUW residents are adamant that the housing need is at a desperate stage, as a deadline looms for the group of "reclaimers" to vacate the property belonging to the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI).

This comes as DPWI Minister Patricia de Lille yesterday engaged with the community on land invasions in the area.

Chairperson for the Khoi community in Grabouw Mark Matthews said the housing need in Grabouw has gone on for years "with little being done for those on waiting lists and backyarders." "We are not illegal occupants, we are reclaimers. We understand the municipality has done all they could to assist, but now it is the DPWI's job to come on board and address the urgent housing issue," said Matthews.

According to Matthews, the land has been vacant for more than 18 years and, despite repeated calls for housing or land to be allocated, their pleas have been ignored.

He said about 350 structures had been erected on the open piece of land, adding that the land could eventually house 4 000 people.

"We reclaimed the land since November 5 last year. Before this, the land was vacant for many years but now, since we have been there, DPWI wants to take action, asking what the

plans are for the land. Why now only?"

DPWI said the department is the custodian of the forest properties, which have been allocated to the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (Deff) for plantation purposes.

"During 2014, Deff commissioned a study to conduct a situational analysis of commercial forestry. The study recommended replanting plantation areas, sooner rather than later, in order to shorten the already inevitable looming shortage in the country ...

"I communicated to community members that DPWI understands the needs of our communities, especially for housing, but illegal actions cannot be condoned and the state has a legal obligation to protect its land from illegal land invasions, or any illegal activity," said De Lille.

DPWI and Deff had obtained a court order on April 21, 2021.

"On April 25, 2021, the court interdict was served on the unlawful occupants. The court gave the respondents until May 19, 2021, to give reasons as to why the interim order should not be made final," a statement by DPWI read.

"The court has made it clear that this interim order should not be construed as an eviction order and does not entitle the applicants (DPWI and Deff) to demolish occupied structures as at the date of the order, being April 21, 2021, and that the above order shall operate as an interim order with immediate effect."