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SO, IT SEEMS as if the lake on the R31 is finally going to be drained. However, the solution being presented does not fill me with enthusiasm.

Here's why ...

On August 20 last year, this newspaper published a story on its website titled **Dept says R31 road is 'safe'**. In that story, the NC's Department of Roads and Public Works declared the R31 between Kimberley and Barkly West safe for driving purposes but advised motorists to drive with caution in the area.

The reason for this is because just a few days earlier an accident had taken place and a 31-year-old truck driver had to be rescued "from drowning in sewage".

Back then, in the same article, the spokesperson for the MEC for Roads and Public Works, Bongani McDonald Silingile, stated that the road could be used, saying, "The road is drivable and there is no erosion of the road surface as a result of the sewage." He then added: "Contrary to false information, the road has neither collapsed nor been flooded with sewage."

Then on July 2 last year, another story: **'Lake Zamani Saul' poses a danger to all** – EFF. The EFF was said to have renamed the dam of sewage and stormwater that has accumulated along the R31 after the premier, Dr Zamani Saul, apparently because the environmental hazard has submerged a section of the road and poses a health risk to residents and livestock.

The report went on to say that farmers from the Gogga Pump Farmers Association said they suffered huge stock losses after their cattle and sheep drowned after falling into sewage-filled trenches.

No more reason to worry?



Water that has pooled alongside the R31. File picture

The report ended with the following: "A report into the leakages pointed to billions of rands that were needed to fix the problem. It was reported that the existing infrastructure was not designed to handle the increased volumes of human waste generated due to recent developments in the city."

Sol Plaatje Municipality stated that the process to fix a sewage pipe between Gogga Pump Station and the Homevale Wastewater Treatment plant was "almost complete".

Roll on to February 25 this year and a report: **Where is the R500 million?** states that "There appears to be no trace of the R500 million that was allo-

cated by the Northern Cape provincial government to improve service delivery in Kimberley."

EFF caucus leader Pontsho Mochwana was quoted as saying that "money was supposed to have been allocated to fix the Gogga pump station as well as the overflowing water on the R31".

Then on May 10, DA spokesperson on Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs Cilliers Brink was quoted in an article titled **DA calls on national govt to intervene in water, sewage crisis**. Brink said: "Since 2004, unattended sewage leaks from the Gogga pump station, combined with freshwater leaks from the Riverton mainline, were

allowed to slowly fill up four pans alongside the R31, crossing the road and engulfing it from either side. It is also affecting the Platfontein community."

Brink had then added that the R32 million project to broaden and lift the affected portion of the road did nothing to prevent the unfolding crisis.

The reports go on and on. Then on July 12 this year, I received an e-mail from a concerned Kimberley resident.

He wrote: "Our wonderful sewage lake out on the R31 road to Barkly West. They are now building a higher level road to restore traffic movement. The worrying thing is that they have cut a trench to the west onto the

next lowland still on Platfontein farm (I presume) and here have created another lake.

"The water in this second lake is busy moving westwards and is now through the fence on what must be a private farm. More worrying is that at the Nootgedacht Glacial Pavement turn-off road the water is again lapping onto the R31 and is already through the culvert to the other side."

He then adds, and remember this is four months ago, "My huge concern is that someone (and I hope it is not true) is hoping the water will move further westwards where it will ultimately flow downhill into the Vaal River UPSTREAM of Barkly West."

"Barkly residents will then have the pleasure of drinking our sewage-polluted water."

So, with all that said, should Kimberley residents and those living 'downstream' from Kimberley's lake be relieved or alarmed that the R31 water is to be drained into the Vaal River?

Can we now be at peace after the MEC for Roads and Public Works, Fufu Makatong, during a site visit to the R31 this week, told the acting public protector, advocate Kholeka Gcaleka, that the water from the R31 lake would be drained into the Vaal River?

According to Makatong, "The Department of Water and Sanitation is satisfied that there is no contamination of the water." Adding that the process would take six months to complete.

So, could we ask, are those environmental reports available for scrutiny? And could Kimberley, Barkly West and those down river get their hands on the report?

That would help ease our concerns a great deal.