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'Most intense storm' wreaks havoc in the Western Cape

● Major roads to Cape Town closed

Lindiwe Tsobo
and Denene Erasmus

Large parts of the Western Cape suffered severe damage over the long weekend as widespread flooding, landslides and rockfalls forced the closure of all major roads leading into Cape Town.

Heavy rainfall on Sunday and Monday forced several rivers to break their banks, destroying infrastructure, causing electricity outages and flooding homes and farmland in Greater Cape Town and the Overberg, Overstrand and Winelands regions.

As downpours continued late on Monday, provincial authorities and disaster management were reacting to emergency situations as they arose and said assessments of the extent of the damage would be carried out "when it is safe to do so".

Over a 24-hour period between Sunday and Monday, parts of the Overberg region received up to 170mm of rain. Stellenbosch in the Winelands district recorded 133mm, and 92mm of precipitation was recorded at the Royal Yacht Club in Cape Town.

On Sunday the Western Cape government activated the Provincial Disaster Management

Centre after an update from the SA Weather Service confirmed that the approaching storm would be more severe than had previously been communicated.

The weather service upgraded its warning from level 6 to an orange level 9, warning of disruptive rain and gale-force winds, the highest the province has yet seen. A status orange warning is given before expected weather conditions that could significantly affect people, property and activity in an area. The highest warning level used by the weather service is 10.

FARMING

"We are still dealing with the situation... the focus now is on prevention, safety and saving lives where necessary," Cape Town spokesperson Wouter Kriel said on Monday.

"Damage assessment and costs will be calculated later."

Agri Western Cape CEO Janne Strydom said it will take a week or two to assess the damage done to farms.

"It is difficult at this stage to estimate the extent of the damage. For now it seems most of the damage is to infrastructure such as buildings, dirt roads and low-water bridges," he said.



Swept away: A view of a damaged road between Botriver and Caledon on Monday after heavy rains in the Western Cape. Several rivers broke their banks, destroying infrastructure, causing electricity outages and flooding homes and farmland in Cape Town, the Overberg, Overstrand and the Winelands. /Reuters

Grain farmers in the Western Cape, who produce about half of all the wheat grown in SA, are approaching the harvest season. Strydom said the barley and wheat harvests are still about four to five weeks away in most regions. He hopes that the damage to these crops is minimal

and that it will not be necessary to postpone harvests.

He is more concerned about the canola harvest. In some parts of the province farmers have already started cutting canola so that it can dry out for harvesting. The quality of these crops could be adversely affected if farmers

are unable to access the fields within the next week or two.

"We have also received some reports of losses of small stock. It is lambing and shearing season so the cold, wet weather poses a real danger for the sheep," Strydom said.

Western Cape transport &

public works department spokesperson Jandre Bakker told Business Day that full assessments will follow once the weather system passes, but the road closures will result in significant additional travel

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times via alternative routes and cause traffic congestion on certain routes. "The most significant challenge is the N2 at Botrivier, which has washed away and is impassable."

In a media briefing on Monday afternoon, Provincial Disaster Management Centre acting head Schalk Carstens said the centre and all its entities have been preparing days in advance. "We have never had a storm like this before," Carstens said.

He said that all informal settlements in Greater Cape Town have been affected by flooding to some degree.

Western Cape development & planning MEC Anton Bredell said emergency teams are



focusing on saving lives.

"The hard work of our teams over a number of years in preparing for emergencies such

On hand: Imtiaz Sooliman says his organisation, Gift of the Givers, has been asked to help provide flood assistance where roads have been washed away and communities evacuated. /File

as these has also been demonstrated in how we have responded," he said.

Imtiaz Sooliman of Gift of the Givers said the organisation has been asked to help provide flood assistance where roads have been washed away and communities evacuated.

"The Botrivier has burst its banks, with parts of the N2 washed away, leaving a trail of destruction," he said.

"Bredasdorp, Goliath Estate informal settlement in Kraalfontein, Sewende Laan in Sandvlei, Sir Lowry's Pass Village, Lwandle, Mbekweni, New Rest informal settlement and Gustav informal settlement have been completely flooded."

