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GEORGE BUILDING COLLAPSE

Winde: Investigations must remain 'watertight'

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AS THE SAPS investigation into the George building collapse reaches 65% completion, Western Cape Premier Alan Winde has indicated that the province's portion will also remain watertight and not be disclosed publicly.

Winde made the announcement yesterday, after meeting with Western Cape Police Commissioner, Thembisile Patekile.

He said the lead investigator into the case, Captain Johan de Lange, was also present and he was informed that the investigation was 65% complete.

Both Winde and Patekile said they agreed the case must be urgently concluded, but that the investigation must be thorough and it should be watertight so that it can stand up to prosecutorial scrutiny.

"We cannot allow this matter to be tried in the media. This will not offer the survivors, their families, and the relatives of those who died any closure. They deserve to have this matter han-

dled professionally and transparently, with care and compassion," said Winde.

He urged the commissioner to take the necessary steps to expedite the matter, as the police is the lead agency responsible for investigating incidents of this nature.

At the end of January, Winde handed over the report containing the structural engineering findings from an independent investigation commissioned by the Western Cape Government into the disaster to Patekile and the investigating team.

Winde's office said he has undertaken to write to certain stakeholders to urge them to also expedite their investigations.

Human Settlements Minister Thembisile Simelane addressed the media last week, in which she revealed that five officials from the National Home Builders Regulatory Council (NHBRC) were suspended and could face criminal charges including that of the developers behind the construction, Neo Victoria Developments, and that there were no arrests at this stage.

The outcome of the NHBRC investigation also made recommendations that

implicated officials be held accountable for their actions while the charges that will be levelled against them include dereliction of duty, misconduct, negligence, dishonesty, and misrepresentation in official inspection reports.

The investigation revealed systemic failures, non-compliance with regulatory standards, and mismanagement by both the NHBRC and project personnel which included irregular status upliftment, late enrollment, inspection lapses, material quality issues, and safety violations including a lack of professional qualifications and the unlawful use of official credentials.

Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure, Dean Macpherson, said his office, as the custodian of the built environment sector, directed its entities to initiate investigations.

"In May 2025, the Department will release another component of the broader investigation focusing on acts of omission or commission by all built environment role-players in relation to the disaster.

"Questions were sent to municipalities, provincial departments, profes-

sional bodies, and entities to inform the process," he said.

"The findings to be released in May 2025 will address potential professional and statutory breaches, specifically focusing on actions taken by any Registered Person(s) identified during the investigation.

"This report will complement the one released by the Ministry of Human Settlements, which focused on building compliance matters.

"These findings will contribute towards enhancing public safety at construction sites and will include recommendations and actions aimed at preventing similar incidents, with an emphasis on improved oversight and regulatory practices."

Dirk Wessels, DA Western Cape spokesperson on Infrastructure, said they also called for transparency into the outcome and report and to engage: "From the meeting we hope to get clear answers on what went wrong, who is responsible, what steps are being taken to prevent any future incidents of this nature and to provide answers to the families who have lost loved ones."