

Publication: People's Post Constantia-Wynberg - Main

Title: Rescue facility powerless

Publish date: 30 Sep 2025

Page: 1

Reach: 20000

AVE: R 52728.15

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Rescue facility powerless



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The Hout Bay Seal Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre (HBSRC) says its future and the lives of countless seal pups hang in the balance as the facility enters its eighth month without electricity.

Despite repeated appeals to the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) and the City of Cape Town, the Centre remains disconnected from the grid.

A chain of emails, seen by the *People's Post*, between the Centre and various government departments paints a grim image of frustration by the Centre management.

Since July this year, the facility has tried in vain to get assistance from the government.

The situation raises urgent questions about government accountability ahead of the October seal pup season.

"Every year, dozens of orphaned seal pups are rescued from our coastline. They need constant warmth from heaters and infrared lamps to survive, but without electricity, we cannot provide it," said Ilana Nel, a volunteer and the Centre's director of PR. "We are days away from pup season. If nothing changes, we face the heartbreaking reality of being unable to save them. This week alone, we have already lost three pups."

Since February this year, the Centre has relied on generators, gas, and community donations to keep operations running.

Volunteers say funds meant for food, veterinary care, and rehabilitation are instead being spent on fuel.

Local residents and businesses have stepped in, covering the cost of prepaid meters and donating bedding and jackets during the cold winter months, but Nel warns that this is not sustainable.

"We cannot run a facility of this nature on makeshift power forever. It places both the animals and our team at risk," she said.

The Centre continues to receive monthly rental invoices despite lacking essential services.

Charging rent under these conditions is unfair

Nel argues that charging rent under these conditions is unfair and potentially unlawful, citing the Rental Housing Act, which obliges landlords to maintain leased property fit for its intended purpose.

Volunteers have written repeatedly to DPWI, Cape Town Mayor Geordin Hill-Lewis, Western Cape Premier Alan Winde, Ward councillor Roberto Quintas, and Public Works Minister Dean MacPherson, but responses have been limited.

HBSRC plays a vital ecological and community role in Hout Bay, one of Cape Town's busiest harbours.

The Centre rescues Cape fur seals injured in fishing gear or abandoned as orphaned pups and runs outreach programmes teaching local children about marine conservation. Without electricity, both animal welfare and years of community work are at risk.

"Donor money, community goodwill, and years of outreach are being wasted because basic services are not provided. Unless urgent steps are taken, we may be forced to close our doors," Nel warned. "The cost of government inaction will not only be measured in wasted resources, but in the lives of the animals we exist to save."

In response to queries from *People's Post*, the DPWI confirmed that a contractor has been appointed to arrange the connection of electricity supply and install prepaid wall metering.

"All the necessary work has been undertaken, and full restoration will be completed in approximately seven days," the department said.

Explaining the delay, DPWI said the property was previously leased to Oceana (Lucky Star), which permitted HBSRC to operate there.

"When Lucky Star terminated the lease, the lease agreement was intact. Oceana recently discovered that they were still paying for the supply of electricity, and they requested the City of Cape Town to disconnect, which they duly did," the department said.

Belinda Abraham, communications manager for the Cape of Good Hope SPCA, said: "It is always distressing to learn of the challenges



The Hout Bay Seal Rescue and Rehabilitation Centre (HBSRC) says its future and the lives of countless seal pups hang in the balance as the facility enters its eighth month without electricity. PHOTO: SUPPLIED



Cape fur seal laying alongside a pool that's not working.

faced by other organisations in the sector. We understand the concern this creates, particularly as seal pup season approaches.

"The Cape of Good Hope SPCA's Wildlife Department is fully equipped and committed

to responding to marine wildlife emergencies, including orphaned or stranded seal pups.

"Reports of seals in distress can be made by calling 021 700 4158/9 any time of the day or night."