



## forestry, fisheries & the environment

Department:  
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Private Bag X12, Knysna, 6570, Demar centre, Main Road, Knysna, Tel: +27 44 302 6900

**Dear Mr. S. Holmes,**

As discussed, I would like to share some thoughts and points regarding your property, Erf 301 Wilderness.

As landowners, it is imperative that we comply with the legislative requirements concerning firebreaks to mitigate the risk of veldfires.

### **Requirements for Preparing Firebreaks**

1. **Landowner Responsibility:** Landowners are required to prepare firebreaks on their side of the boundary where there is a reasonable risk of veldfire (Section 12(1)).
2. **Assessing Reasonable Risk:**
  - The concept of “reasonable risk” is evaluated using the “reasonable person test.”
  - If a reasonable person in the position of the landowner would foresee that failing to prepare a firebreak could lead to a veldfire that might start or spread across their land, causing harm to others, they would take action to prepare one.
  - Consequently, the landowner should also take the necessary steps.

### **Factors Influencing Firebreak Specifications**

The specifics of each firebreak depend on various factors, including:

- **Topography:** Consider the slope and aspect of the land.
- **Vegetation Type:** Assess flammability, height, and fuel load.
- **Weather Patterns:** Note the dominant fire wind direction.
- **Environmental Considerations:** Take into account visual impact, erosion potential, and the presence of rare species or wetlands.



1



**Batho pele-** putting people first

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- **General Considerations:** Evaluate practicality, effectiveness, and the use of natural boundaries.

Indigenous forests in South Africa are often regarded as natural firebreaks for several reasons, contributing to their acceptance as areas with minimal bushfire risk:

#### 1. Moist Microclimate

Indigenous forests generally have a higher moisture content due to their dense canopy and rich understory. This moisture helps to suppress the intensity of potential fires, as the humidity within the forest creates conditions less conducive to fire spread.

#### 2. Diversity of Flora

The biodiversity within indigenous forests means a variety of plant species, many of which are less flammable. The presence of species that are adapted to the local environment can help reduce the overall fuel load, making these areas less likely to ignite or sustain a fire.

#### 3. Natural Fire Resistance

Many indigenous tree species have developed characteristics that enhance their fire resistance, such as thick bark or the ability to recover quickly after a fire. This resilience contributes to the overall stability of the forest ecosystem.

#### 4. Canopy Coverage

The dense canopy of indigenous forests acts as a physical barrier, reducing wind speeds at the ground level and limiting the spread of fires. This canopy also shades the forest floor, further decreasing the likelihood of fire ignition from ground-level heat.

#### 5. Soil and Ground Cover

The rich organic matter found in the soil of indigenous forests helps retain moisture. Additionally, the ground cover, including leaf litter and underbrush, can decompose and absorb moisture, which reduces the availability of dry fuel that might otherwise ignite.

#### 6. Ecological Balance

Indigenous forests support a balanced ecosystem that includes natural predators of fire-prone species, contributing to lower fuel loads. This ecological balance helps maintain the health of the forest and minimizes the risk of uncontrolled wildfires.



## 7. Historical Fire Patterns

Historically, indigenous forests have coexisted with fire as part of their ecological cycle.

### Conclusion

While no environment is entirely without fire risk, the characteristics of indigenous forests in South Africa contribute to their role as natural firebreaks. Their unique ecological features make them less susceptible to bushfires, providing both ecological benefits and protection for surrounding areas. I am therefore of the opinion that no fire breaks are required on your property since the whole property is covered with indigenous forest and is situated on a South facing slope.

Regardless of the above I would recommend you join the Southern Cape Fire Protection Association. (Application form will be attached to this email)

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Kind Regards



**Paul Gerber**  
**Senior Regulations Officer: Forestry Development**  
**Directorate: Forestry Policy Management(Western Cape)**

