

# Rescued from raging torrents

More than 130 people were rescued by helicopter from floodwaters in Lephalale, formerly Ellisras, in northwestern Limpopo on Tuesday, 11 March.



The town of Lephalale has been cut off after three rivers flooded outside the town. Image: Vanessa O'Neale Crous [SA People](#)

The town and surrounds were cut off from the outside world as three nearby rivers burst their banks. "We are now an island," resident Charmain Wilson Robbertse told The Times.

Since last week, private helicopter pilots have been airlifting tourists trapped in lodges and farmers stranded at their homes.

Others have used tractors to ferry fresh water and food to residents cut off from main roads, while staff from Medupi power station have been travelling in boats to reach trapped people.

On Monday, 10 March, farmers used boats to get to a woman stranded on her smallholding at night, said Lephalale community forum policing chairman Thyss Eloff.

"No lives have been lost. I think we have done pretty well," said Eloff. He said a restaurant on the edge of town was completely under water with only the top of walls and roof visible.

"Businesses are going to suffer," Eloff said.

Resident Karen Standler said it was "absolute chaos" in the town late on Tuesday afternoon.

Three rivers - the Palala, Limpopo and Mogol - have broken their banks.

"It's a disaster," said Wilson Robbertse. "The closest one will get to Lephalale is two hours away. The roads to the town

have been washed away." The police and army have not been assisting.

In Mpumalanga, 11 people have drowned in overflowing rivers since 4 March, said police spokesman Leonard Hlathi.

The National Disaster Management office spokesman, Tsakani Baloyi, said she knew nothing about Lephalale floods or the deaths in Mpumalanga.

She said: "It's not the end of the world. There are isolated incidents of flooding. No province has been declared a disaster area and none have asked to be."

SA National Defence Force spokesman Brigadier Xolani Mabaso said the army had not been called out to help. "We are on stand-by," he said.

In Johannesburg, 210 women and children from Zandspruit informal settlement were evacuated after 100 shacks flooded.

Johannesburg Emergency Management Services spokesman Robert Mulaudzi said officials were monitoring critical areas in the city.

As rivers rise, the Kruger National Park has closed all its bush camps and gravel roads until next week. The tar roads and main camp sites remain open.

The Vaal River is expected to flood and all of the Vaal Dam's seven sluice gates have been opened.

Water affairs department spokesman Mava Scott said the Grootdraai Dam on the Vaal River in Standerton was 102% full and still rising.

Source: The Times via I-Net Bridge

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