

Sewage, garbage, dirty water: Theewaterskloof is in a mess after years of bad management

- There have been four municipal managers at Theewaterskloof Local Municipality in as many years.
- Resignations, illegal appointments, and political instability are behind the continual changes
- Water, refuse disposal and sewage treatment are all suffering as a result.

By [Steve Kretzmann](#) 17 Jun 2025



A lack of refuse removal services in Caledon's Remvasmaak informal settlement results in waste being dumped at the bottom of the hill on the bank of the Bath River. Remvasmaak resident Anele Boyce said the dumping problem could be reduced if the municipality supplied bin bags and a skip. Photos: Steve Kretzmann

In the list of comments on the Theewaterskloof Municipality draft budget, nine residents of Riviersonderer complained about the water being dirty, smelly and undrinkable.

An 8% increase in the water tariff has since been passed, yet food and hospitality businesses have had to invest heavily in filtration systems or find alternative sources of water.

DA Councillor Piet Stander said the town used to have the best quality water in the Overberg, as it was gravity-fed from the perennial Olifants River in the adjacent mountains to the reservoir. But Stander said lack of maintenance meant pipe breakages and leaks had not been fixed, so for the past four years, water had been pumped from the Sonderend River, which was polluted by upstream effluent and agricultural runoff, including pesticides. He said the cost of chemicals now needed to treat the water has exceeded what it would have cost to fix the pipes.

Riviersonderend is not the only town in the municipality in which the drinking water quality does not meet the minimum national standards.

Besides Riviersonderend, the municipality includes Caledon, Greyton, Genadendal, Tesselaarsdal, Botriver, Villiersdorp and Grabouw. Only Tesselaarsdal and Botriver have acceptable quality drinking water, according to the Department of Water and Sanitation's [Integrated Regulatory Information System \(IRIS\)](#). The rest are all failing the microbiological standards, having more faecal bacteria in the water than is allowed.

IRIS also shows that sewage treatment works in all eight towns are failing, and have been for years in most releasing sewage that has not been properly treated into the streams and rivers in the area.

The Caledon sewage treatment works has just had a R56m upgrade, paid for in this financial year. But there have been 32 high-level failures this year, with effluent spewed out with E. coli counts of more than double what is allowed, along with high levels of ammonia and other pollution indicators. A visit to the plant found that although new infrastructure and equipment was installed, only half of it appeared to be working. Of four aerators, only two were working, and of two [clarifiers](#), only one was operational.



The landfill at Caledon was supposed to have been closed and rehabilitated years ago. Not only is it still in use, but the refuse dumped there is uncovered, with wind blowing plastic into the surrounding landscape.

The management of solid waste in Theewaterskloof is also problematic. The Caledon landfill, carved into the northern side of the Klein Swartberg mountain, is uncovered, and plastic waste is being blown across the landscape. It is also full. The municipality's [Spatial Development Framework](#) of 2023 states it should have been closed when a transfer station was completed in the 2020/21 financial year, and the landfill rehabilitated. The transfer station, from which waste is supposed to be taken to Karwyderskraal regional landfill site outside Hermanus, has been completed but is unused, with the paved road in the premises already needing repairs.

In Villiersdorp, a transfer station to take waste to Karwyderskraal was built, but has been stripped for use as building material in informal settlements. The Spatial Development Framework states the landfill has been closed and is to be rehabilitated, but as the transfer station is dysfunctional, the landfill, while officially closed, is still used. Residents still use it to dump rubble and garden refuse provided the road there has been graded and is passable. When it is not, they dump their rubbish in the bushes alongside the road. A resident, who asked not to be named, said household refuse is collected and taken to the Caledon landfill.

The crumbling pillars of municipal service are reflected in the lack of stability in municipal management. There have been four municipal managers in as many years since the municipal elections and the ousting of Danie Lubbe by the new coalition of the ANC, Patriotic Alliance (PA), EFF and Good.

Lubbe was subsequently employed by Langeberg Municipality. The contrast between the two municipalities is stark. The Auditor-General doubts Theewaterskloof can be considered a going concern and racked up more than R300m in irregular and unauthorised expenditure in 2023/24. But Langeberg received an unqualified audit and no irregular or unauthorised expenditure, and just R5,000 in fruitless and wasteful expenditure.

The ANC-led coalition, which was heavily reliant on Good joining in with its three seats in the 27-seat council replaced Lubbe with Boy Manqoba Ngubo in June 2022. Manqoba Ngubo's position was finalised with a five-year contract in October that year, but he unexpectedly resigned five months later.

The ANC-led coalition then [controversially appointed](#) Wilfred Solomons-Johannes ahead of a better-qualified candidate. Western Cape MEC for local government, Anton Bredell, challenged the appointment and the high court duly ruled [it was illegal](#). Solomons-Johannes stood down as municipal manager in June 2024. He remains in the municipality as director of community services, but in April was placed on suspension while R41m in missing disaster relief funds for floods in September 2023 is investigated.

Reynold Stevens was then appointed in an acting position from July 2024 until replaced by Walter Hendricks in mid-February. Hendricks was officially appointed from his acting position on 30 May.



New municipal manager Walter Hendricks is the fourth municipal manager since Daniel Lubbe was ousted after the 2021 local government elections. Hendricks hopes to get the municipality back on an even financial keel so that municipal services can be improved.

Hendricks is frank about the challenges the municipality faces.

“We’re in a mess, we don’t have money,” Hendricks told *GroundUp*. “The first thing we need to do is remain within the boundaries of the law.”

Besides the coffers being left empty, he said there were internal challenges with certain people appointed who “don’t add the kind of value you need”.

He said his aim was to focus on the municipality’s core functions of water, electricity, roads and stormwater refuse and waste water.

“Luckily, I have a mayor who has bought into that.”

He said he was working closely with provincial and National Treasury officials, and master plans were in place.

Once Theewaterskloof was financially stable again, they could start looking at reinstating facilities such as swimming pools in the towns, upgrading sports fields and improving libraries.

“We have to eat the elephant bit by bit.”

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