NATURE'S VALLEY
CONSERVANCY / ULONDOLOZO / BEWAREA

THE GROOT (WES) RIVER ESTUARY

The Groot (Wes) River estuary is a small to medium-sized, black-water (peat-stained) system situated on the south coast of South Africa, in the Tsitsikamma section of the Garden Route National Park, Bitou Local Municipality (LM). It is classified in the 2018 National Biodiversity Assessment NBA) (SANBI, 2019) as a temporarily closed system, which is breached artificially when low-lying developments located within the estuarine functional zone are inundated. Nonetheless, the Groot (Wes) River estuary is considered to be pristine, quite diverse and rather unique with two threatened fish species and is consequently nationally important. It has also been identified as part of the set of national priority estuaries by virtue of its location within a protected area. The current management of the estuary falls under the under the jurisdiction of South African National Parks (SANParks), according to the Garden Route National Park Management Plan.

Historical fish data on the Groot (Wes) River estuary is limited. Seventeen species have been recorded in the system, predominantly marine and estuarine dependent species.

In general, the Groot (Wes) River estuary appears to serve as a viable habitat for both estuarine-resident and estuarine-associated marine species.

The overall ecological health of the Groot (Wes) River estuary is in an A/B Category (i.e. natural / largely natural with few modifications).

The Groot River estuary is one of a number of tidal estuaries along the Tsitsikamma Coast that plays an important nursery function to many juvenile fishery species. At a later stage in their life cycles fish leave the estuary and enter the sea, where they continue their lifecycle.

Prof Paul Cowley from the J.L.B Smith Institute of Ichthyology takes the argument further when he suggests that this small estuary may play a very important role along this stretch of coastline.






The 2011 NBA developed a biodiversity plan for the estuaries of South Africa by prioritising and establishing which estuaries should be assigned partial or full Estuarine Protected Area status. The Groot (Wes) River estuary forms part of the core set of priority estuaries in need of protection to achieve biodiversity targets in the National Estuaries Biodiversity Plan. The Groot (Wes) River estuary has statutory protection as it is situated in the Garden Route National Park.

The Estuary Importance Score for an estuary takes size, the rarity of the estuary type within its biographical zone, habitat diversity and biodiversity importance of the estuary into account. Biodiversity importance, in turn is based on the assessment of the importance of the estuary for plants, fish invertebrates and birds. using rarity indices. These important scores ideally refer to the system in its natural condition. The Groot (Wes) River estuary was deemed to be overall important.

*Estuary is an A Category
*estuary is in a relatively pristine condition

NBA 2018



Photographer: Janet Schuiling

The direct and indirect benefits derived from estuarine ecosystems services are manifested directly or indirectly in tangible income and employment.

As the Groot (Wes) estuary forms part of the GRNP, the Park's vision informs the vision for the estuary1 and is detailed as below. The proposed amendment to the parks vision is noted, as per its draft GRNP MP 2020 to 2029.

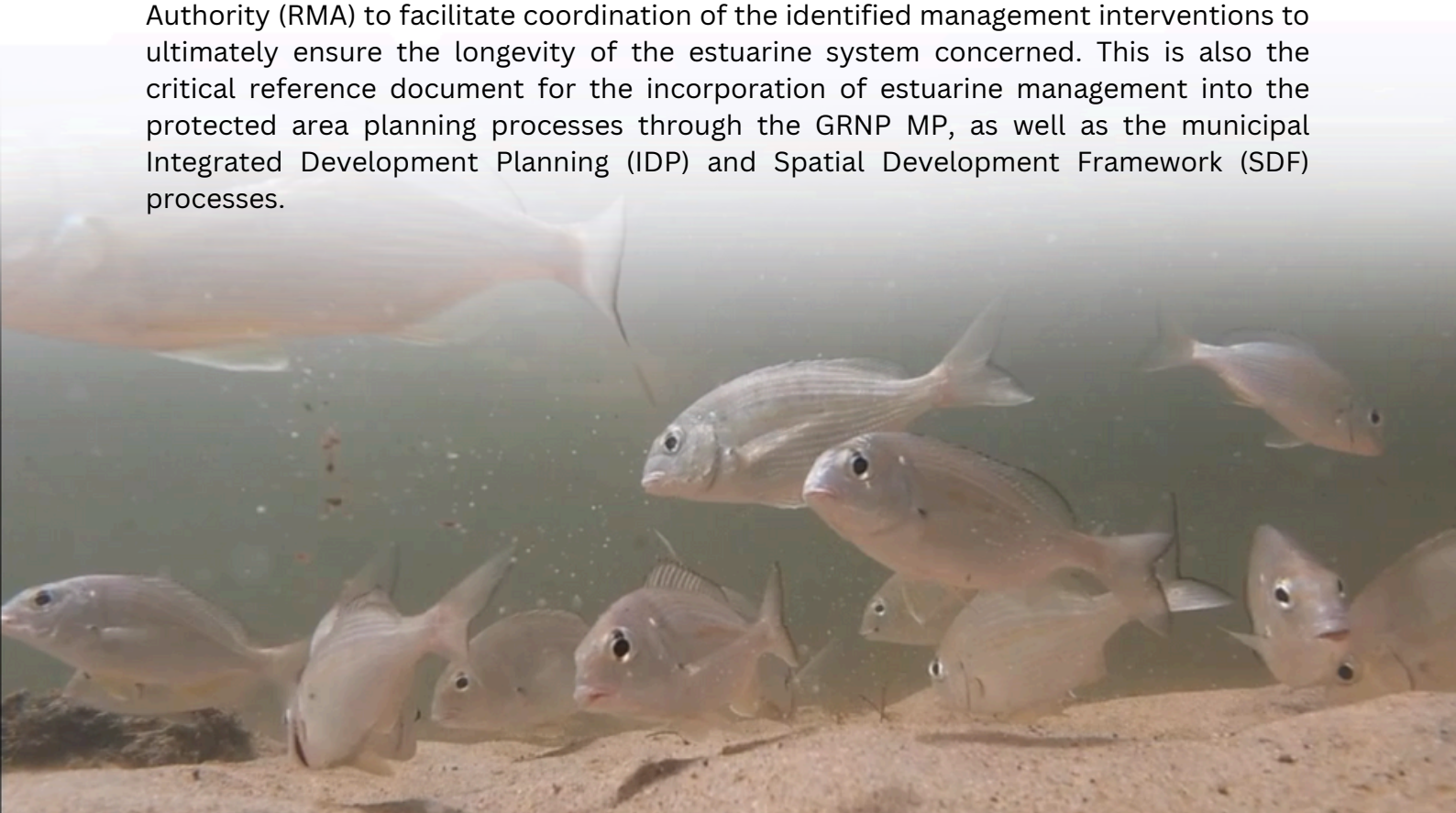
The Groot (Wes) River estuary is defined in the 2018 National Biodiversity Assessment (NBA) (SANBI, 2019) as a small, temporarily closed estuarine system, within the warm temperate biogeographic region of South Africa, adjacent to Nature's Valley in the Bitou Local Municipality, Garden Route District, on the southern Cape coast. The size of the estuary, as defined by estuarine functional zone, is approximately 69.9 ha, extending over a length of 2.5 km. The geographical boundaries of the Groot (Wes) River estuary, delineating the Estuarine Functional Zone (EFZ),

1.1 The ecological health, natural patterns and processes of the Groot (Wes) River estuary are maintained and safeguarded, living resources are sustainably managed and estuary nursery function protected (including the long-term processes of natural variation in structure, function and composition over space and time)

2.1 The biodiversity of the Groot (Wes) River estuary is protected through appropriate and effective management actions

It is strongly recommended that the existing Groot (Wes) tripartite management structure, and the Estuary Steering Committee / Management Forum, comprising SANParks, the Bitou LM, Nature's Valley Ratepayers Association and Nature's Valley Trust (NVT), and relevant arrangements remain in place for co-management of the Groot (Wes)River estuary going forward.

This EMP is the primary document for use by the identified Responsible Management Authority (RMA) to facilitate coordination of the identified management interventions to ultimately ensure the longevity of the estuarine system concerned. This is also the critical reference document for the incorporation of estuarine management into the protected area planning processes through the GRNP MP, as well as the municipal Integrated Development Planning (IDP) and Spatial Development Framework (SDF) processes.



The lagoon plays an important nursery function to significant numbers of juvenile's species, like the Leervis, White Steenbras, and White Stumpnose whose fry move into the lagoon to mature. Its is also a critical breeding ground for crustaceans and birds.

How can you support this system?

- Fishermen abide by the fish size, numbers and bait quota.
- Monitor your septic tanks. that they are functional and so they don't spill over, affecting our ground water.
- Do not use harmful chemicals on your lawns that may wash into the lagoon.
- Install rain tanks, utilise grey water where possible.
- Do NOT attempt to breach the lagoon. This is unlawful, issued with a hefty fine.
- Respect the sensitive lagoon environment for the birds, fish and invertebrates whilst
- Swimming, fishing or canoeing.

