

# Calm returns after borehole dispute

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IN contrast to a previous meeting, when farmers walked out on proceedings, this time a meeting between farmers, Amatola Water and independent geohydrology specialists SRK Consulting last Friday at Zest Café ended amicably.

Aside from councillor Ray Schenk, there were no representatives from Ndlambe Municipality present.

Boreholes on farms around the area have run dry, and farmers are angry that Amatola Water has used up groundwater essential to their cattle and crops to feed Port Alfred with potable water as part of its bulk water project.

The company has sunk boreholes at various farms in the area, a contentious issue among many of the farmers present, and farmers feel they are being strong-armed by Amatola Water and that their problems are not being listened to, let alone addressed.

"If proven that our boreholes seriously affect the livelihoods of the farmers, the DWS [Department of Water and Sanitation] will not allow us to continue," said Steve Landolt, project manager for Amatola Water's call down unit, responsible for the Ndlambe bulk water project.

"We need to measure the impact of our extraction of the water before we can make any plans. But I want to

assure you there is no pre-set outcome. This is just an attempt to make sure we are in possession of the correct data to make a decision, and your cooperation is essential," Landolt said.

Due to some bad experiences in the past, farmers are concerned about allowing Amatola Water access to their properties. Also, the statistics as presented by the previous analysts were hotly disputed by farmers and hence the appointment of SRK Consulting.

There were also contentious issues around the licensing of boreholes by farmers, as well as the use by Amatola Water and Ndlambe Municipality of boreholes after the licence to use them had

expired.

After Landolt had given his assurances that there was no prescribed outcome for the analysis, and that the DWS would not allow a project to continue that seriously harmed farms or the ecology, farmers agreed to cooperate.

Amatola Water will therefore sink boreholes and install loggers (equipment to monitor essential data) which will be regularly inspected and maintained.

Another problem in the past has been the loss of water from leaking pipes and pumps and the subsequent water wastage. SRK will monitor levels and flows and, in conjunction with water-flow meters at the municipality, should be able to determine how much water is being lost due to leakages.

Eunice Goossens from SRK explained some of the technicalities and promised to address some of the farmers' issues before the next meeting, scheduled for 10am at Zest Café on Friday November 18.