

## ISDF Report #2: Is Conflict Being Resolved?

Posted on [Jan 30, 2014](#) by [Mike Hampton](#)



The report mimics a robot telling us to go, be careful or stop i.e. each sector is accorded a Green, Amber or Red rating.

**Is conflict being resolved?**  
**Status: Red**  
**Findings: Conflicts are left to fester.**

**Impartial report:** A dispute emerged at the very beginning of the process between The Knysna Municipality and civil environmental groups in the area which has resulted in the development of polarisation between the two groups.

Even though this conflict is not about how the process is being undertaken or implemented per se, it is affecting the process as it revolves around the appointment of the consultant who the environmental groups feel has a conflict of interest and should not have been awarded the tender.

The civil environmental groups (including the Western Heads-Goukamma Conservancy, Western Heads Protection Group, Knysna Environmental Forum, Buffels Baai Homeowners Association, Belvidere Homeowners Association) have lodged an objection in terms of section 49 of the supply chain management policy of the Knysna Municipality in relation to the awarding of the tender for the ISDF Framework, No. 3 of 2013 to the consortium, Knysna Creative Heads. The civil environmental groups feel their objection has not been sufficiently addressed by the municipality and would like to lodge an appeal of the final decision.

**They have requested information in terms of the Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) 2 of 2000 relevant to the appointment of Knysna Creative Heads appointment in order to draft an appeal but the request for information has been denied by the Knysna Municipality on the grounds that:**

- It would involve the unreasonable disclosure of personal information regarding the tenderers.
- Same would involve trade secrets, financial, commercial or technical information would likely cause harm to the financial or commercial interest of other tenders.
- Same would involve the disclosure of information which could constitute an action of breach of confidence that the council owes to other tenderers.

This has resulted in the civil environmental groups appealing the decision refusing access to information related to the appointment of Knysna Creative Heads Consortium and the group are standing their ground and are prepared to utilize all means at their disposal to take the issue forward which includes litigation.

The Knysna Municipality feel that the objection against the award of the tender as having been dealt with and the group responded to in a letter dated 17th of May 2013. The municipality feel they have acted in accordance with the supply chain management policy and provided sufficient justification for denying the civil environmental group access to the requested information.

**The stance taken by the Knysna Municipality challenges the criterion of transparency in stakeholder engagement, which would argue that being transparent about what is going on and how decisions are made is likely to allay suspicion.** Independence can be demonstrated through the appointment of a steering committee on conditions its members are from a diversity of entities (Rowe and Frewer 2000). A steering committee is in place for the ISDF process.

The conflict and polarisation between the Knysna Municipality and civil environmental groups remains unresolved and is being left to fester. Other extreme groups have been managed but also appear to still publicly voice distrust in the municipality.

*Resident Quote 1: "There is a constant stone wall between the public and the Knysna Municipality erected by the municipality...and until you break that down, too many groups will not believe this process... and there will be legal action... so it's not in the benefit of anybody."*

*Resident Quote 2: "The municipality purposefully changed the date of the objections to the tender so that she [the municipal manger, Lauren Waring] would have fewer objections. They do many things on purpose. We have not had transparency from the municipality and from the DA for ages."*

Despite the conflict being between the municipality and the civil environmental groups it is affecting the implementation of the process by the consultant as it permeates several of the criteria under assessment in the public engagement process and is providing grounds for the process to be held in suspicion. **This unresolved conflict has been left to fester justifying a red rating for this criterion.** The higher the levels of dissatisfaction the more stakeholder engagement platforms will be used as a mechanism to publicly vent frustration.

Engaging in dialogue can promote understanding and trust and can assist in building relationships by moderating debate rather than mediating negotiations. In others words rather than letting the conflict fester and remain unresolved allowing for dialogue would be more productive.

**Mike Hampton (Knysna Keep):** *Yep, we've been stonewalled, shut out, bamboozled and bludgeoned into compliance of other people's agendas that are not congruent to the health of all who live in Knysna.*

Read [Report #3: Participation, Communication and Information](#).