



CITY OF CAPE TOWN
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KELP MANAGEMENT ON CAPE TOWN'S BEACHES

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WHY IS KELP SO IMPORTANT TO CAPE TOWN'S BEACHES AND WHY DO WE NEED TO MANAGE IT?

The presence of kelp on Cape Town's beaches provides a variety of environmental, social and economic benefits. The indiscriminate removal of kelp in large quantities can have an impact on the functional integrity of coastal ecosystems, which may have a number of 'knock-on' consequences.⁷ Some of the benefits that beach-cast kelp provides in Cape Town include the following:

1



The presence of kelp on Cape Town's beaches traps wind-blown sand, creating a 'thicker' beach. This is important as more sand on beaches contributes to establishing a natural buffer against erosion and will help with protecting dunes from wind and wave energy.⁶ A 'thicker' beach and well-established dunes offer protection to abutting coastal public and private infrastructure during storm surges.⁵

2



This vegetation is important for creating and stabilising sand dunes. Wind-blown sand that is not stabilised can lead to the smothering of coastal infrastructure such as walkways, roads and even private property.

3



Accumulated kelp on a beach provides a physical buffer against wave attack.

4



The presence of kelp on beaches attracts a range of organisms which break the kelp down through the decomposition process. This process is vital for the nutrient cycle³ which is necessary for the establishment of pioneer floral species such as dune spinach (*Tetragonia decumbens*)^a and the seepampoen (*Arctotheca populifolia*)^b.

5



Beaches where kelp is frequently removed show low insect abundance and biodiversity.⁴ Shorebirds feed on insects attracted to the kelp. Studies indicate that coastal ecosystems and shorebird populations are at risk of possible collapse due to loss of insects as a food source after sustained kelp removal.⁸



A DELICATE BALANCING ACT

While kelp provides a range of environmental and social benefits, it can at times cause a public nuisance:

- Kelp can wash up in large quantities, obstructing or impeding access by the public to and along the beach;
- Under certain conditions it can attract large quantities of kelp flies; and
- Under certain circumstances, kelp can generate an unpleasant odour.

The City has developed a **kelp management protocol** which addresses the nuisance component of kelp, while simultaneously ensuring that the ecological benefits of kelp are retained. The protocol guides the City's management of kelp and is based on the following principles:

- Beach-cast kelp is only removed from beaches that are **considered highly altered environments** (i.e. no longer considered as functional or productive ecosystems) and which are popular recreational destinations. Kelp is currently removed from approximately 1% of the total length of Cape Town's coastline.
- **Beach-cast kelp is left on beaches that are in a more natural state** and which are less popular in terms of recreational use.
- Kelp **may be removed when it washes up in excessive amounts** (typically during winter months after severe storms).

AREAS WHERE THE CITY REMOVES KELP

Guided by the principles of achieving a balance between social and environmental needs, the City currently removes kelp from the following beaches:

West Coast and Atlantic Seaboard

- Southern half of Small Bay, Bloubergstrand
- Three Anchor Bay, Sea Point
- Rocklands Beach, Sea Point
- Queen's Beach, Sea Point
- Saunders' Rocks, Sea Point
- Clifton 2nd, 3rd and 4th Beach
- Camps Bay Beach
- Western section of Hout Bay Beach

False Bay Coastline

- Southern section of Fish Hoek Beach
- Danger Beach, St James
- St James, opposite tidal pool
- Muizenberg, Surfers Corner
- Blue Waters Coastal Resort, Mitchells Plain
- Monwabisi Beach, Khayelitsha
- Gordon's Bay, adjacent main beach parking facility

Did you know? South Africa and Namibia are the only countries in Africa that have kelp forests. Kelp forests are recognised as one of the most productive and dynamic ecosystems on Earth – as productive per unit area as a tropical rain forest. They provide food and shelter for many species, including seals, fish, invertebrates, whales, sea otters and seabirds. South Africa's kelp forests are home to some fish species that are found nowhere else in the world. These forests also absorb energy from rough seas which reduces the erosive potential during storms.

KELP REMOVAL PERMITS AND APPLICABLE LEGISLATION

It is illegal to remove kelp from the beach (or the ocean) for commercial purposes without first obtaining a permit from the National Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries in terms of the Marine Living Resources Act 18 of 1998. Provided a permit is obtained as per the requirements of the Marine Living Resources Act, people may collect kelp for personal use; however, it may not exceed 10 kg per person, per day. Permits for personal use may be obtained from a post office.

For further information on the **City of Cape Town's coastal cleaning protocol**, visit: <http://www.capetown.gov.za/Explore%20and%20enjoy/nature-and-outdoors/our-beaches-and-coast/conserving-our-coast>

References

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