

End to illegally built cottages

By **BONGANI HANS**
Mthatha Bureau

Green Scorpions move in amid villagers' tears and distress

THERE were tears at a Transkei coastal village yesterday as eight holiday cottages went up in flames.

The "Green Scorpions", the law enforcement arm of the Department of Economic Affairs and Environmental Affairs (Dedea), destroyed a number of cottages, illegally constructed at Port St Johns.

Senior manager for environmental compliance and enforcement Div de Villiers said the area where the holiday homes had been built was a conservation area.

The Mthatha High Court, on May 21 last year, granted Land Affairs, Water Affairs and Forestry, Environmental Affairs and Tourism permission to destroy the cottages.

"We notified the owners, but they did nothing to demolish the cottages."

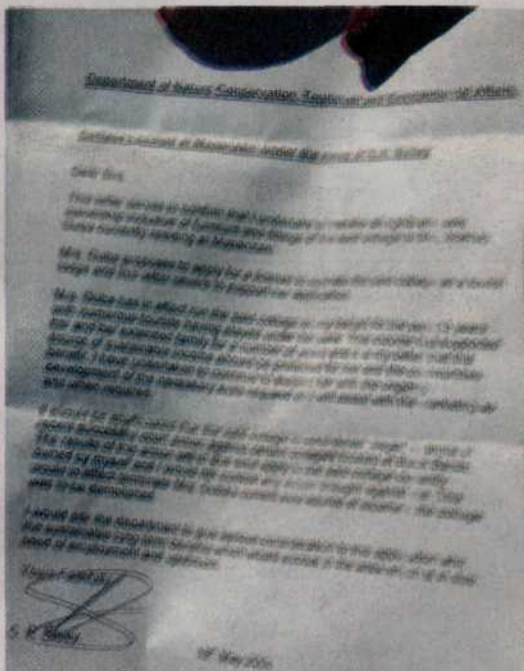
Yesterday, officials removed furniture and other items before setting the cottages alight.

Sheriff of the Port St Johns Magistrate's Court Phumla Ningisa said the removed items would be kept safe for the owners to collect after paying the fines.

The action by the Green Scorpions did not go down well with 54-year-old Nokhaya Duba of Mapansana village in Port St Johns, though.

She cried uncontrollably as her former employer's five-room cottage was reduced to ashes.

She said the cottage had been



LOST IN FLAMES: Left, the letter of transfer and, right, Nokhaya Duba cries as the cottage she claims was transferred to her by her former boss was set alight by environmental affairs officers and the sheriff near Mpanda, Port St Johns yesterday.

Picture: LULAMILE FENI

given to her by owner Chris Robin Bailey when he left for overseas in 2008. She even showed the Saturday Dispatch a letter signed by Bailey on May 19, 2008.

"I have been travelling to Mthatha

to apply to the government to allow me to keep the house."

Another cottage owner, Durban businessman Hilton Kidger, said the demolition did not affect him, but was a loss to the community.

"For the past 16 years our properties have been a source of income in that village." His employee, Skatuli Duba, 19, said he has lost an income of R50 a day.

"I support my unemployed parents

and eight brothers and sisters with this money. From now there is no income for my family," said Skatuli.

De Villiers said the action was to clear Wild Coast of illegal occupation. — bonganih@dispatch.co.za



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