

Phalaborwa

Power Outage Statistics Report

(2024)



**LET'S CHANGE
BA-PHALABORWA**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



- **SUMMARY**
- **INTRODUCTION**
- **CRUCIAL NOTES**
- **WORST AFFECTED AREAS**
 - **Incident 1** –Prolonged Festive Season Blackout
 - **Incident 2** –Chronic Infrastructure Failure and Extended Power Outages
 - **Incident 3** –Prolonged Multi-Street Outage
 - **Incident 4** – R71/Hendrick Van Eck Road: Business Corridor Blackout
- **HOURS PER MONTH**
- **NO ELECTRICITY DUE TO:**
 - Aged Infrastructure
 - Load Shedding
 - Cable/Transformer Theft
- **POWER OUTAGE INCIDENTS**
- **POWER OUTAGE INCIDENTS vs. HOURS WITHOUT ELECTRICITY**
- **REGULATORY NON-COMPLIANCE & GOVERNANCE FAILURES**
- **ENGAGEMENTS**
- **ANNEXURE A**
 - Letter of Demand to NERSA
 - NERSA's Response
- **LCBP DIRECTORS**

SUMMARY



Ba-Phalaborwa is in the grip of a deepening electricity crisis. Frequent, prolonged power outages—caused by decaying infrastructure, poor maintenance, insufficient capacity, and institutional dysfunction—have become a hallmark of daily life for residents, businesses, and the tourism sector. These failures jeopardize public health, economic stability, and basic constitutional rights.

Let's Change Ba-Phalaborwa (LCBP) has compiled this report using real-time data gathered through community WhatsApp groups, verified and tracked via the Service Delivery Incident Register. The evidence paints a stark picture: power failures are not isolated technical glitches, but symptoms of a broken system that continues to deteriorate in the absence of meaningful intervention.

This report documents not only the human and economic toll of recurring blackouts but also the legal breaches committed by the Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality (BPM) and the regulatory inaction of the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA). Despite repeated warnings and formal complaints, both institutions have failed to comply with their obligations under the Electricity Regulation Act, NRS 047/048, and relevant license conditions.

LCBP remains committed to holding these entities accountable. With support from AfriForum and other legal partners, we will continue to pursue justice on behalf of the community. Without urgent provincial or national intervention, Phalaborwa faces the looming collapse of essential services and governance.



INTRODUCTION

Let's Change Ba-Phalaborwa (LCBP) is a non-profit, non-political, community-based and volunteer organisation established to protect, promote, advocate for, and advance the best interests of the Ba-Phalaborwa community in relation to municipal service delivery, governance, and development. As a registered NPC (Non-Profit Company) and recognised stakeholder, we are dedicated to addressing the collapsing state of municipal infrastructure, failures in sustainable service delivery, and deficiencies in the governance of the Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality (BPM) and other organs of government, particularly regarding local government affairs that directly affect the people of Ba-Phalaborwa.

Our mission is simple: to ensure a sustainable and prosperous future for all residents of Ba-Phalaborwa. We strive to create a thriving community where residents enjoy reliable municipal services, transparent governance, and sustainable development opportunities. By empowering the community and working with various stakeholders, we aim to improve municipal service delivery, governance, and development for the community.

We have consistently engaged with the Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality (BPM) in efforts to address these challenges, but the municipality closed their doors to us, hindering progress. In response, we have escalated our efforts and requested intervention from several key organisations, including the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA), the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), the Public Protector, the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGHTA), and the Provincial Premier.

We have partnered with AfriForum SA, who have appointed their lawyers, Hurter & Spies Attorneys, to work closely with LCBP in **preparing a case against NERSA (National Energy Regulator of South Africa) for failing to act decisively under the Electricity Regulation Act, No. 4 of 2006 ("ERA")**, particularly with regard to its regulatory responsibilities.

Communication with Lepelle Northern Water has been severed by both municipalities, further complicating our efforts to resolve the backup-power at the reservoirs issues in Phalaborwa.

Let's Change Ba-Phalaborwa remains resolute in our mission to advocate for the community and drive the necessary changes to ensure sustainable service delivery and accountable governance. We will continue to pursue all available avenues - legal, administrative, and collaborative - to ensure the well-being of the Ba-Phalaborwa community and hold those in power accountable for their failures.

Our vision is clear: a thriving Phalaborwa where residents benefit from excellent municipal services, transparent governance, and meaningful development opportunities. We believe in the power of the community, and through persistence and collective action, we are confident that we can secure a brighter, more prosperous future for Ba-Phalaborwa.

We manage several WhatsApp groups subscribed by approximately 2,000 residents, community organisations, and businesses. These platforms help log service delivery complaints and receive updates from Ward Councillors, filling the communication gap left by the municipality.

The information presented in this report is extracted from our [Service Delivery Incident Register](#)

This report aims to document the growing collapse of Ba-Phalaborwa's electricity reticulation system, quantify the human and economic impact, and highlight the legal breaches by the Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality (BPM) and the National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA), which has failed to enforce compliance.



CRUCIAL NOTES

1. Ward 12 remains temporarily connected to Ward 11 until the line to Selati is repaired. This is due to four collapsed poles and seven damaged poles just outside Selati in May 2023, allegedly affected by termite damage, but widely believed to be the result of poor maintenance.
2. Our water supply suffers greatly during power outages/loadshedding due to the absence of backup power at any of the reservoirs.
3. Our infrastructure is extremely old and fragile. The lack of maintenance; bush clearing, substations, replacement of damaged poles/cables, etc results in unnecessary power outages and extended repair time.
4. Many of the streetlights are in a state of disrepair, varying from broken globes to collapsed poles. This has deteriorated gradually over time without any attempt to repair and are a safety hazard with exposed live electrical cables.
5. Transformers, substations and mini substations are unprotected. They are left exposed to potential tampering as well as life threatening for children.
6. Substations and servitude areas are heavily overgrown hidden with dense bush and creepers making their way up to the overhead cables due to the lack of maintenance.
7. Power outages are easily caused by the slightest rainfall or a gentle breeze.
8. The population has experienced substantial growth over time and continues to expand. However, the electrical infrastructure has not been expanded to meet the increasing demand, despite ongoing development, including the construction of student accommodation blocks. In numerous cases, this expansion involves converting or extending a typical 3 to 4-bedroom house into multiple rented rooms.
9. After over 2 years (since October 2022), an electrical standby number (083 627 8095) was implemented on 6 June 2024 to provide after hours support.
10. Due to the absence of a Chief Electrical Engineer and failure to appoint one, the current electrical team severely lacks essential skills and knowledge and is still short staffed.
11. In November, the Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality switchboard was out of commission due to **non-payment** of the Eskom account.
12. The Municipal Manager was suspended in September 2024 due to a security tender scandal and resigned in October 2024 following a failed appeal.
13. While the issues highlighted above are prevalent throughout the town, this report delves into the area's most severely impacted during 2024.

These issues are systemic, not incidental. The data presented here is not a list of isolated events; it represents deep-rooted governance and regulatory failures.

WORST AFFECTED AREAS



Numerous areas experienced prolonged power outages, with residents enduring days without electricity due to various infrastructure and maintenance issues, insufficient supplies in stock, and the unavailability of machinery due to breakdowns. While these challenges were widespread, this report focuses on the areas most severely impacted during 2024.

The incidents detailed in this section represent some, but not all, of the worst affected areas. They have been selected to illustrate the severity and range of issues faced across Phalaborwa. This section outlines the locations most severely impacted throughout 2024, based on incident reports and community submissions.

Incident 1 – Potgieter / Alex Du Toit / Ward 11: Prolonged Festive Season Blackout (21 December 2023 – 2 January 2024)

In late December 2023, just before Christmas, parts of Potgieter and Alex Du Toit Streets in Ward 11 were plunged into darkness for **13 consecutive days**. The outage began on 21 December at 17h55 and was only resolved on 2 January 2024 at 16h33. This blackout, which stretched across the festive period and into the new year, severely impacted at least **five local businesses** and hundreds of residents.

The outage followed a separate incident involving the Nelgra Place Complex (Potgieter Street), Sealene Flats (Sealene Street), and parts of Robert Broom Street—these areas had just endured a **30-hour power failure** when power was restored in one location only to trip and fail in another. The underlying cause was believed to be faulty underground cabling, though no official communication confirmed the exact issue.

What made this outage particularly distressing was the **complete breakdown in municipal communication and response**. Despite repeated attempts, Ward Councillors could not reach the Municipal Manager or relevant senior officials, neither during nor after hours. As temperatures soared during a regional heatwave, and water availability dropped due to pumps failing without power, the public faced a growing humanitarian risk.

On 24 December—three days into the outage—the municipality reached out to nearby mining companies for assistance. However, the backlog of unresolved faults across Wards 11 and 12 left the **under-resourced electrical team stretched far beyond their limits**. Councillors repeatedly raised alarms about the lack of standby personnel, broken promises regarding festive season overtime staffing, and a general failure by the administration to communicate with the public or respond to urgent needs.

By 26 December, frustration reached boiling point. Councillor Booysen, in a direct message to the municipality, stated:

“It was noted in Council that a list of names and contact numbers be provided, of officials who will be on standby during the Festive Season – nothing was received... NO COMMUNICATION, NO SERVICE DELIVERY, NO RESPECT FOR COUNCIL!”

WORST AFFECTED AREAS



This incident exemplifies the consequences of **neglected infrastructure, poor planning, and institutional dysfunction**. Faults cascade from one street to another, temporary fixes fail, and the municipality remains unprepared for high-demand periods. Most alarming is the municipality's ongoing refusal or inability to coordinate, communicate, or respond decisively—leaving residents and businesses without support during one of the most critical times of the year.

The Potgieter blackout was not just a technical fault. It was the product of **years of maintenance neglect, leadership failure, and non-compliance with basic service delivery obligations**, highlighting once again the urgent need for external intervention and systemic reform.

Incident 2 – Ward 12: Chronic Infrastructure Failure and Extended Power Outages (January 2024)

Ward 12 has become a flashpoint for persistent power outages rooted in years of unresolved infrastructure decay and reactive maintenance. While several serious incidents occurred in January 2024, the origins of the crisis trace back to Easter 2022, when a five-day outage exposed widespread vulnerabilities in the electrical reticulation system, including theft-damaged cables, overloaded lines, and failing substations.

In the months and years that followed, the same faults resurfaced—temporarily patched but never resolved. Between December 2023 and January 2024, a sequence of power failures again crippled the area, with several outages lasting more than 24 hours. The most severe occurred on 11 January 2024, when a substation explosion and a cascading underground cable fault left much of Ward 12 without power for more than **26 hours**. This was followed by another **13-hour outage** on 16 January due to a recurring fault at a kiosk that had previously been temporarily repaired—twice.

Residents and local Councillors were left in the dark—literally and figuratively—while struggling to get answers or updates from municipal officials. Councillor De Beer documented his efforts to obtain support from the Municipal Manager and senior technical staff, most of whom were either unreachable or non-responsive. Contractors from the Palabora Mining Company (PMC) and MJM were brought in to assist, underscoring the **municipality's ongoing lack of internal technical capacity and leadership**.

By 17 January, the instability had reached farcical levels. After a minor planned shutdown for surge arrester replacement, the power tripped again that evening as soon as Eskom restored supply. A jumper exploded at the same substation previously flagged for repair, and what followed was more than **26 hours** of chaos: poor communication, equipment failures, and eventually a second explosion at the Bataleur Substation. With no municipal oversight on-site and contractors expressing frustration, repairs dragged well into the following day.

WORST AFFECTED AREAS



Even after supply was restored, low voltage and blown jumpers continued to plague the area.

These failures are not isolated incidents—they are the result of **delayed maintenance, incomplete repairs, lack of technical oversight, and a municipality that is no longer able to meet its constitutional duty to provide basic services**. The same cables, kiosks, and substations fail repeatedly, and promises of proper restoration remain unfulfilled.

Despite numerous public updates and intervention attempts by ward Councillors, LCBP, and external contractors, Ward 12 continues to face unacceptable and unsafe conditions.

This cluster of outages is not just a service issue; it is a **symptom of systemic collapse**—one that has placed lives, livelihoods, and infrastructure at growing risk.



Incident 3 – Raintree, Torchwood, Waterbessie & Surrounds: Prolonged Multi-Street Outage (24 – 29 June 2024)

From 24 to 29 June 2024, multiple streets in Extension 7 in Ward 12 and surrounding areas experienced a sustained blackout lasting just over **five days**. The outage affected residents in Raintree, Milkwood, Torchwood, Waterbessie, Kremetart, Koorsboom, Knoppiesdoorn, Kierieklapper, and from 25 June onward, also Ironwood, Combretum, and Bosvlier Streets.

The cause was a series of faults at several points in the network: a kiosk opposite the Zorba Complex on Raintree Street, mini substations in Torchwood and at the corner of Raintree and Waterbessie, and repeated underground cable failures. These failures were the culmination of long-standing infrastructure weaknesses that had been temporarily patched but never permanently resolved.

Rather than replacing the compromised underground cable, the electrical team opted to plant new poles and run a 400-metre overhead cable from Waterbessie to Torchwood. The decision to install a workaround instead of addressing the root cause is emblematic of the municipality's broader approach to infrastructure—improvisation instead of planning.

The Palabora Mining Company (PMC) arrived on site at 21h00 on 25 June to prepare for assistance. MJM, another private contractor, joined on 27 June to assist with repair and restoration. Despite these efforts, additional faults were discovered on 27 June at the same mini substation on Raintree and Waterbessie, extending the blackout to Lekkerbreek, Ironwood, Wild Plum, Combretum, and Bosvlier.

WORST AFFECTED AREAS



On 28 June, yet another cable fault occurred in Torchwood, again disrupting supply to Torchwood and Wild Plum. After days of makeshift solutions and patch repairs, electricity was finally restored in the early hours of 29 June, at 01h23.

This multi-day outage demonstrates the **domino effect of neglected maintenance and repeated reliance on temporary fixes**. Each new fault exposed additional weak points in the system, while the municipality once again lacked the internal capacity, tools, or foresight to prevent escalation. The result was five days of darkness, inconvenience, and disruption for hundreds of residents.

This incident reinforces a consistent theme across Phalaborwa: **infrastructure failures are not isolated events—they are the inevitable consequence of a municipality that operates without planning, preparedness, or accountability**.

Incident 4 – R71/Hendrick Van Eck Road: Business Corridor Blackout (27 – 29 November 2024)

The R71 business corridor, stretching from the Kruger Spar to the Kruger National Park (KNP) Phalaborwa gate, has suffered repeated power outages throughout 2024. Businesses along this route—including KNP, 7 SAI, Spar, Forever Resorts, Laasteplaas, and Bushveld Terrace—faced severe operational disruptions, especially during peak tourism periods.

Outage data shows:

- January: 4 outages
- February: 2 outages
- March: 1 outage
- May: 1 outage
- July: 1 outage
- September: 1 outage
- November: **9 outages**
- December: **12 outages**

The most severe incident occurred from **27 to 29 November 2024**, when a power outage lasted for **more than three days** during an extreme heatwave with temperatures exceeding 40°C. The outage originated from a fault along the overhead line connected from Spar to KNP.

WORST AFFECTED AREAS



As with other outages in this area, delays were caused by:

- Time-consuming fault-finding (more than 24 hours in this case)
- Dense bush along the servitude that needed to be cleared before work could begin
- Insufficient personnel and resources as teams were stretched across Wards 11 and 12
- Repeated issues with low voltage and missing phases after partial restorations
- Lack of equipment and spares.

The timeline reveals mounting frustrations:

- Multiple attempts by Ward Councillor Booyesen to get updates from the electrical team were met with silence.
- Technicians struggled to access and reset breakers due to an ongoing strike in town.
- Fault-finding extended well into the night, and even after the cable fault was located, digging and repairs took an additional day.

Power was finally restored at **02h40 on 29 November**. However, the damage—to business operations, equipment, and community trust—was already done.

This incident illustrates how fragile and overburdened the supply infrastructure is along one of Phalaborwa's most economically vital corridors. Despite being home to tourism establishments, military installations, and major retailers, the area remains highly vulnerable to outages. It highlights not only technical failures but the absence of emergency protocols, communication channels, and proactive planning for high-risk, high-impact areas



HOURS PER MONTH

Frequent power outages and loadshedding, often lasting for days, result from cable/transformer theft, infrastructure damage, and lack of maintenance, impacting residents, tourists, and critical facilities

This section presents detailed monthly statistics on power outages across Phalaborwa town, captured through community reporting and the LCBP Service Delivery Incident Register. The data highlights **hours without electricity** per month, broken down by root cause, including:

- Aged Infrastructure
- Load Shedding
- Cable/Transformer Theft

Graphs and tables that follow provide a breakdown per month and per extension, making the scale and distribution of the problem visible and quantifiable:

- Hours without electricity due to aged infrastructure per extension per month
- Power outage incidents per extension per month
- Hours without electricity due to loadshedding per month
- Hours without electricity due to cable/transformer theft per month
- Power outage incidents vs. hours without electricity per extension per month

Note: Where interruptions overlap in cause (e.g., both aged infrastructure and power outages), LCBP has assigned the root cause based on the most immediate contributing factor reported or verified at the time.

2024	
Month	Hours
January	744
February	672
March	744
April	720
May	744
June	720
July	744
August	744
September	720
October	744
November	720
December	744

NO ELECTRICITY DUE TO:



AGED INFRASTRUCTURE

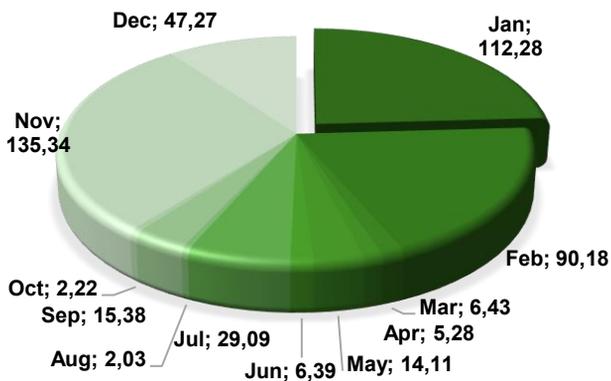
Ba-Phalaborwa's electrical infrastructure has been officially condemned by NERSA as non-compliant with license standards.

Power failures lasting multiple days are commonplace.

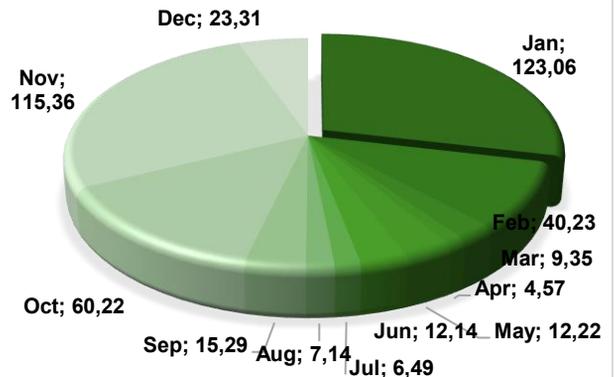
NRS 047 specifies restoration timeframes that the municipality repeatedly fails to meet.

Clause 5.3.1 of BPM's license requires compliance with NRS 048 standards, which are consistently violated.

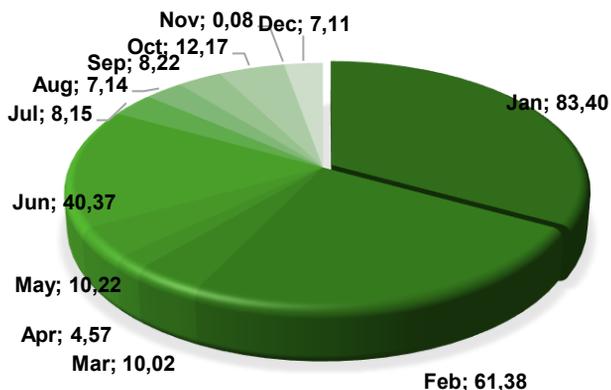
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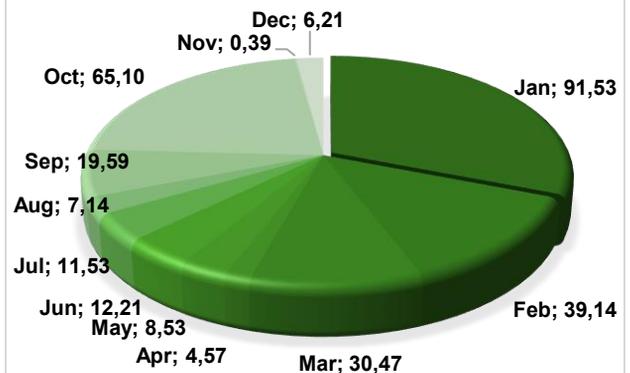
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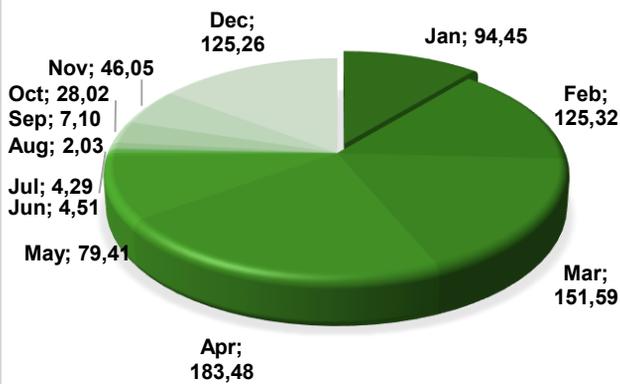


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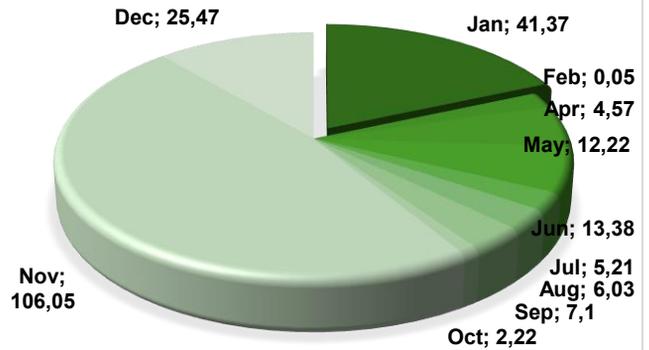


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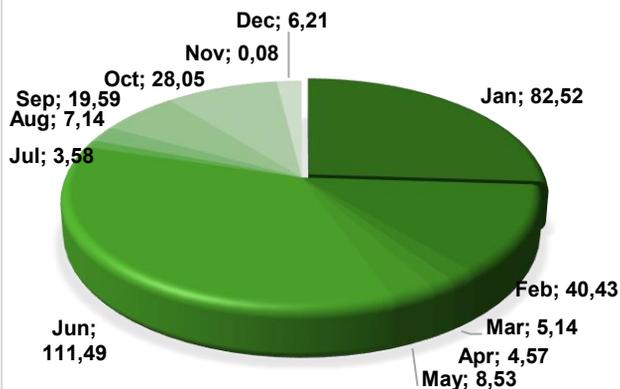
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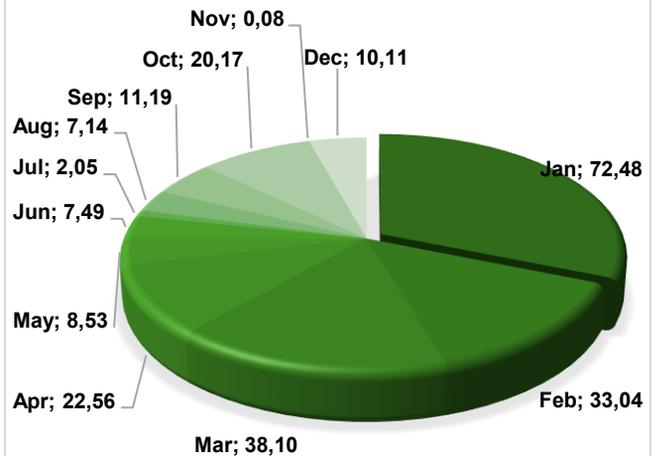
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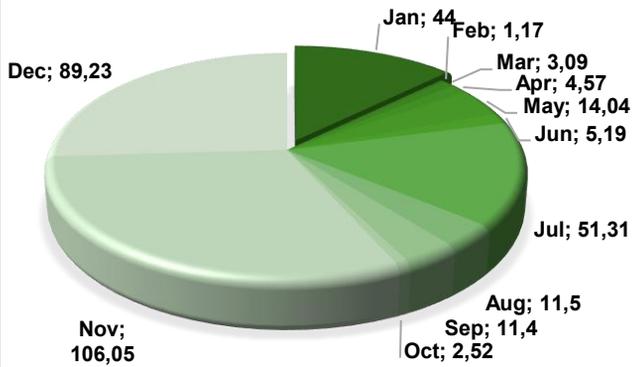


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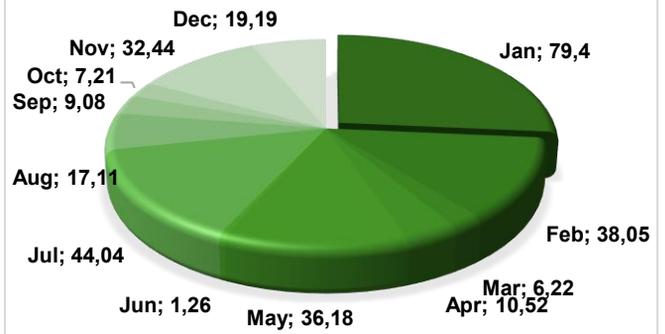


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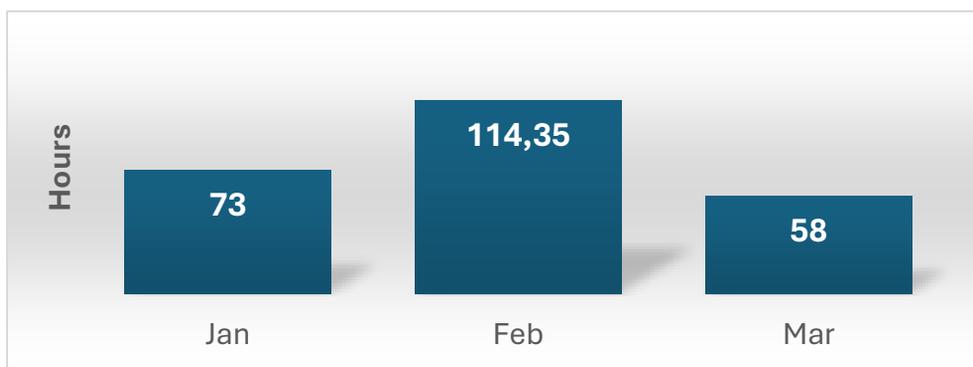


NO ELECTRICITY DUE TO:



LOAD SHEDDING

While loadshedding is a national issue, the impact in Phalaborwa is amplified due to the absence of resilience measures, backup systems, and basic maintenance. These vulnerabilities violate Section 27(f) of ERA, which mandates effective and sustainable reticulation services.



CABLE/TRANSFORMER THEFT

Cable and transformer theft remains a risk, though lower in 2024 due to fewer load shedding schedules. However, the municipality has failed to secure infrastructure. Clause 5.3.2 of the license requires safety protocols and risk mitigation, which are neglected.

MONTH	LOCATION	NUMBER OF INCIDENTS	HOURS
March	Ext 5	3	43,05
April	All	1	4,34
May	Ext 5	1	44,48
July	Ext Schiettocht	1	39,35
December	Ward 12	2	6,21
	Ward 11, excl. Ext 5	1	0,48

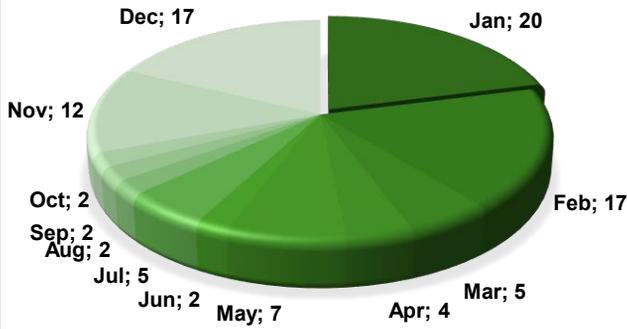
POWER OUTAGE INCIDENTS



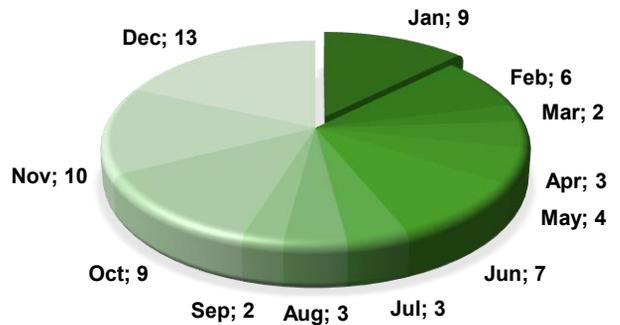
Frequent power outages and loadshedding—often lasting several days—are primarily caused by aging infrastructure, cable and transformer theft, and lack of maintenance. These disruptions severely affect residents, businesses, tourists, and essential facilities,

The graphs below depict the total number of power outage incidents that occurred per extension per month during 2024.

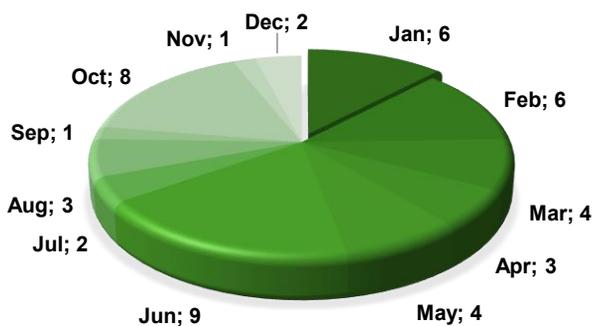
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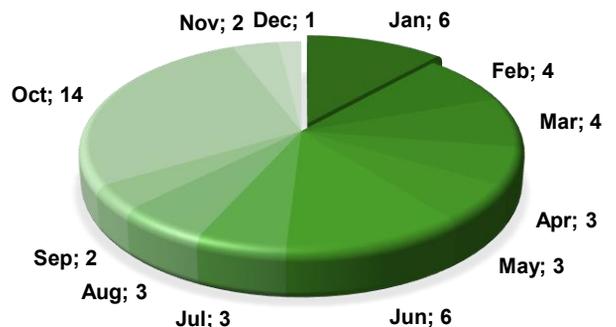
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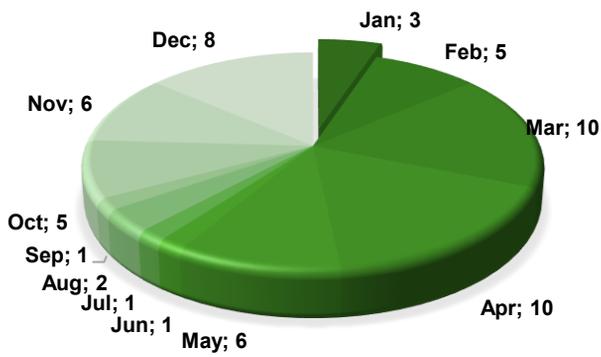
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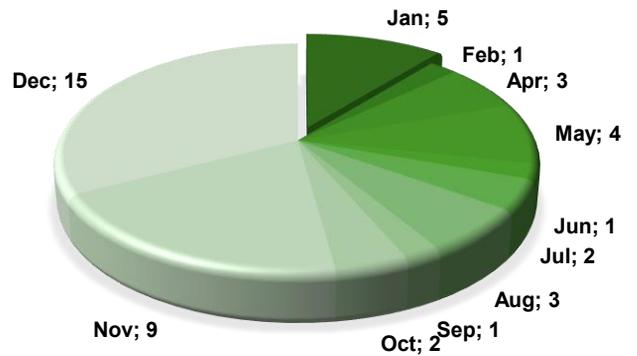
POWER OUTAGE INCIDENTS



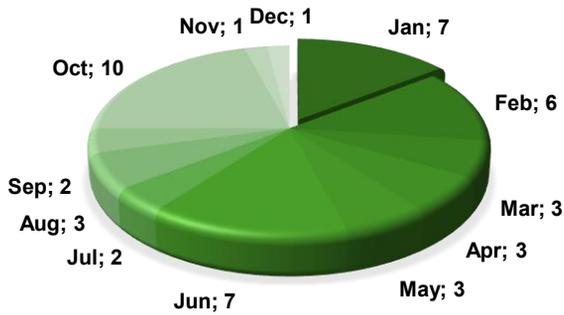
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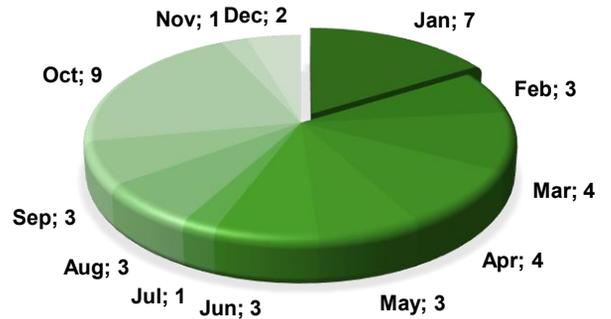
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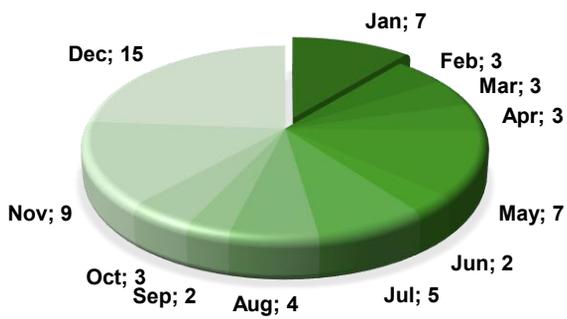
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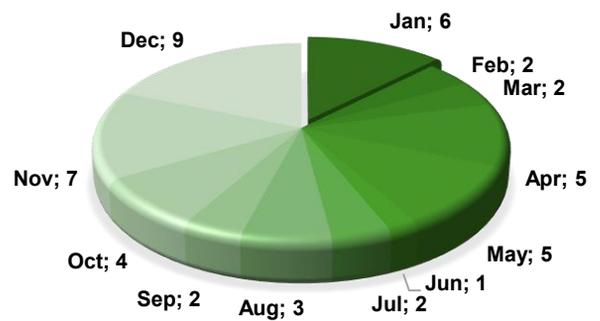
POWER OUTAGE INCIDENTS



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POWER OUTAGE INCIDENTS vs. HOURS WITHOUT ELECTRICITY

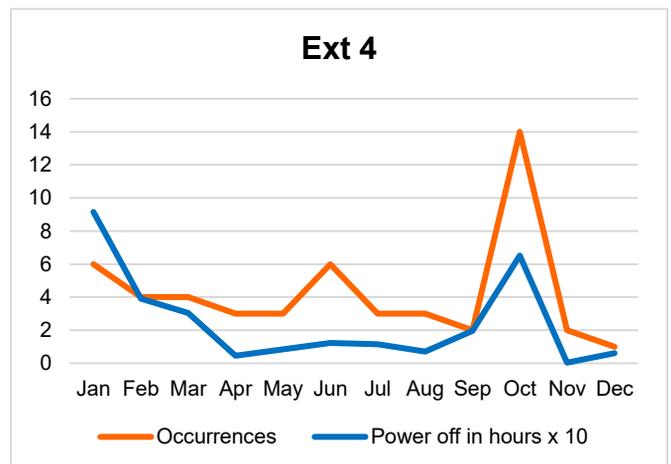
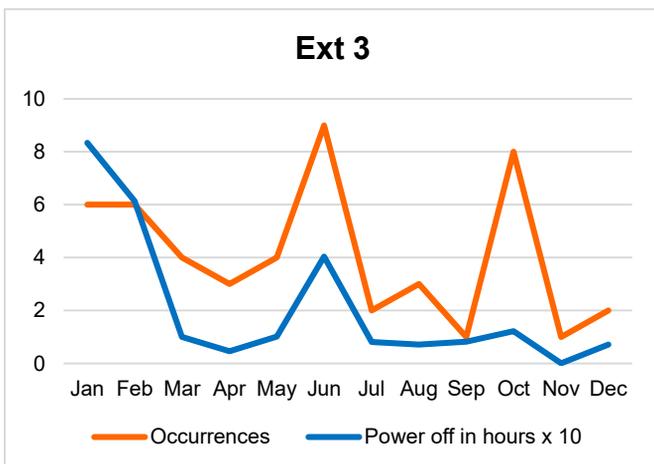
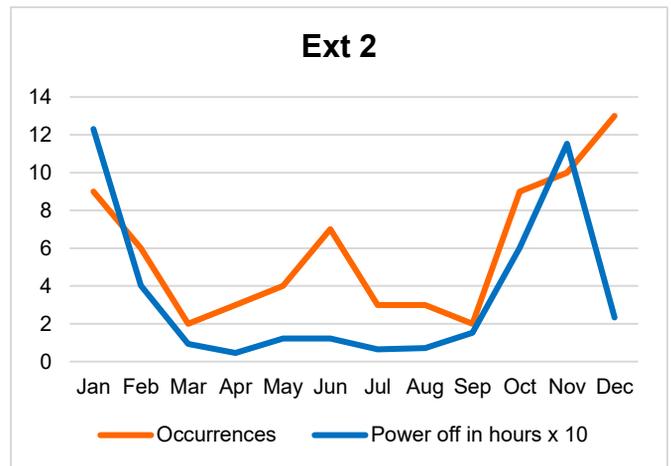
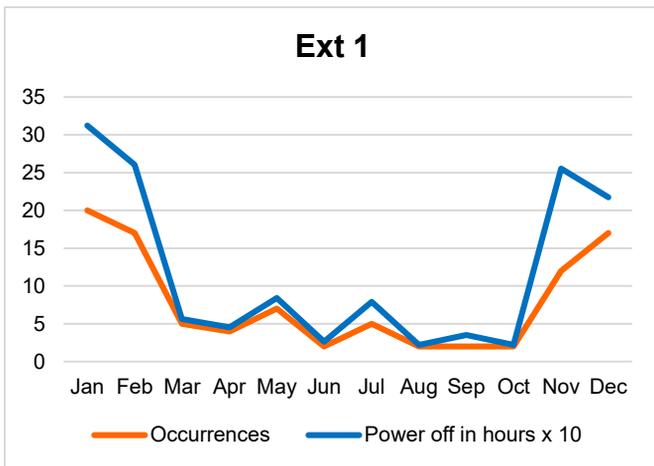


The data captured from 2024, a notably dry year with no rainfall, shows a stark contrast, with both the frequency of power incidents and the total duration of outages were significantly lower compared to previous years.

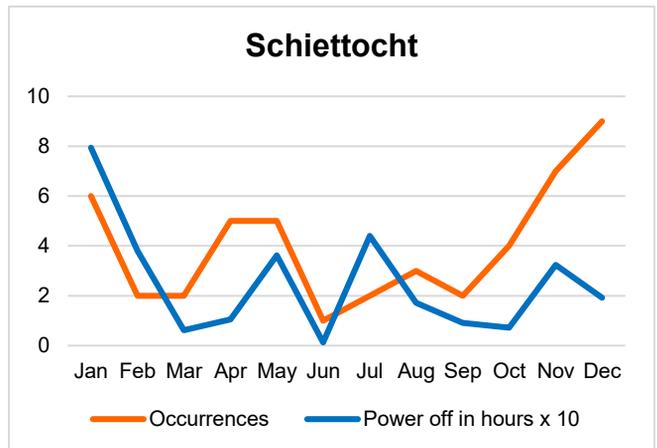
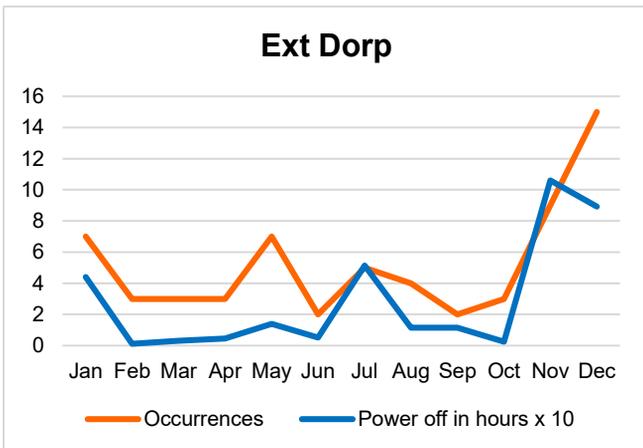
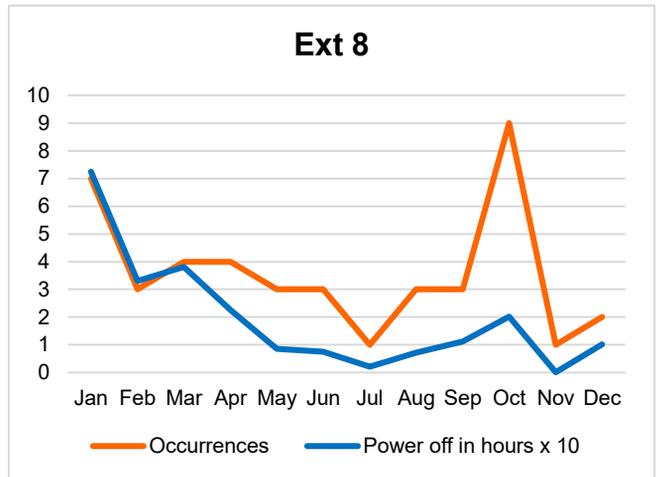
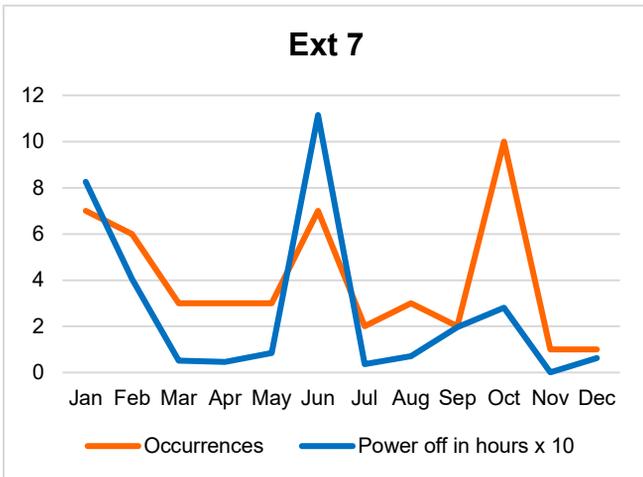
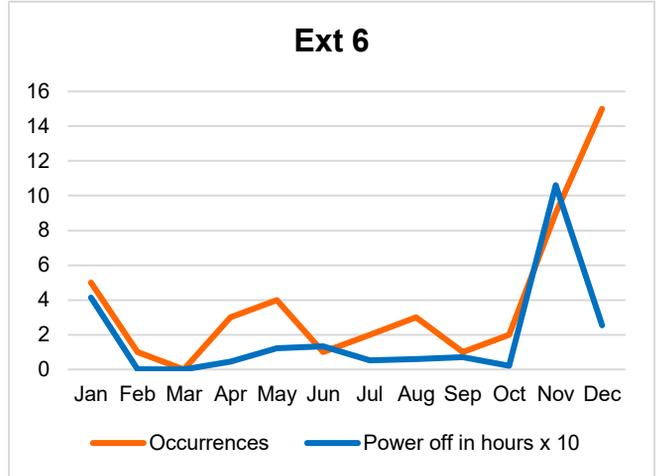
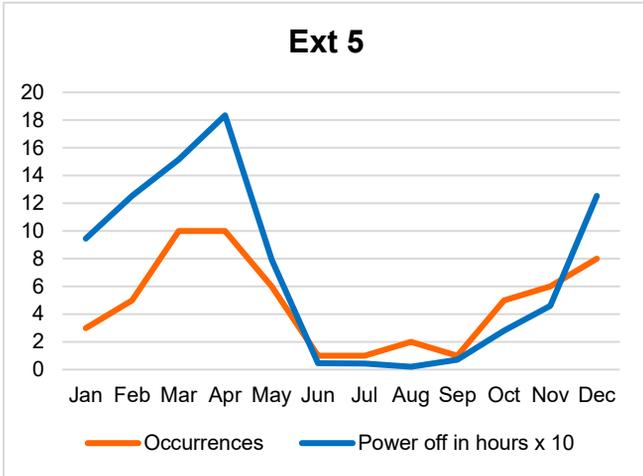
The graph compares outage frequency and total duration per month across various extensions.

The graphs reveal that some areas report fewer incidents but much longer outages. This suggests delays in response and prolonged repair times, likely due to shortages of equipment/spares and limited technical capacity. Such delays are non-compliant with Paragraphs 4.5.2 and 4.5.3 of NRS 047, which mandate a 24-hour fault reporting service and “reasonable” restoration times.

Graph Note: To interpret the relationship between the number of incidents and duration, multiply the reported duration (in hours) by a factor of 10. This adjustment offers a clearer comparative view across areas.



POWER OUTAGE INCIDENTS vs. HOURS WITHOUT ELECTRICITY



REGULATORY NON-COMPLIANCE & GOVERNANCE FAILURES



In 2022, following a formal complaint by LCBP, NERSA declared the Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality in violation of its license conditions. NERSA instructed BPM to implement a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) and established a monitoring Forum. However, the municipality failed to cooperate, missed meetings, and never submitted a credible, budget-backed plan.

Despite repeated calls, NERSA has also failed to act decisively under Sections 18 and 19 of the ERA. As a result, both BPM and NERSA are in violation of:

- Section 152 of the Constitution (basic service delivery)
- Section 33 of the Constitution and the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act (lawful, reasonable, and procedurally fair administration)
- Clause 5.1.4 and 5.3.2 of BPM's license (service quality, maintenance plans)

The infrastructure collapse is now systemic and worsening, with no meaningful CAP in place. The town risks full-scale breakdown of public health, environmental safety, and economic viability.

For full legal references and evidence submitted to the Regulator, see Annexure A: [LCBP's Letter of Demand](#) to NERSA (January 2024).

ENGAGEMENTS



The ongoing municipal service delivery failures in Ba-Phalaborwa pose a serious threat to the well-being of its residents and the sustainable development of the town.

The evidence presented in this report underscores the urgent need for effective governance, proper maintenance of infrastructure, and strategic investments in water and sanitation systems.

We continue to call on the Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality and other organs of state to prioritise the restoration and maintenance of essential services to mitigate further deterioration of our infrastructure and to restore the community's faith in local governance.

- AfriForum SA
- The Arbitration Foundation of South Africa (AFSA)
- Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipality (BPM)
- Co-operative Governance, Human Settlements and Traditional Affairs (COGHTA)
- Foskor Zirconia (PTY) Ltd. (Foskor)
- Limpopo Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET)
- National Energy Regulator of South Africa (NERSA)
- Palabora Mining Company (PMC)
- The Premier
- The Public Protector
- The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)
- SAKELIGE Selfstandige Sakegemeenskap
- Stakeholders
 - AfriForum Phalaborwa
 - Ba-Phalaborwa Chamber of Business
 - Community Policing Forum (CPF)
 - Kruger National Park (KNP)
 - Phalaborwa Accommodation Association (PAA)
 - Phalaborwa Tourism Association (PTA)
 - Phalaborwa Natural Heritage Foundation (PNHF)
- Ward Councillors

Despite multiple petitions, formal letters, and direct engagements, the municipality continues to fail in its constitutional and legal duties. NERSA has failed to enforce its own directives.

We will continue to press for legal accountability and provincial or national intervention.

ANNEXURE A



Letter of Demand:

Continued Non-Compliance with the Electricity Regulation Act and License Conditions (Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality) and Failure by NERSA to Take Action

Date Submitted: 25 January 2024

This letter was handed to both NERSA and the Ba-Phalaborwa Municipality prior to the meeting (which was held at 10am on 25 January 2024 at the municipal office), detailing the failures of the municipality to comply with its electricity distribution license obligations and the failure of NERSA to enforce compliance. It includes legal references, evidence of non-compliance, and outlines the collapse of the municipal electrical infrastructure.

By the time of the meeting held on 25 January 2024, AfriForum had confirmed that its legal team would proceed with court action against both NERSA and BPM on behalf of LCBP. Consequently, LCBP advised NERSA and BPM at that meeting that we were no longer prepared to revisit the same issues again after two years of failed engagements. We requested that both parties respond directly to the Letter of Demand and engage formally with AfriForum's legal team going forward.

NERSA's Response:

NERSA was given a 21-day period in which to respond to the Letter of Demand. Their written response, dated 12 March 2024, was submitted after this deadline and was not addressed to the legal representatives appointed by AfriForum as requested.

NERSA's belated response was subsequently forwarded to AfriForum for legal review and further action.

Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipality's Response:

No official response was received from the Ba-Phalaborwa Local Municipality at the time of reporting.



LET'S CHANGE BA-PHALABORWA

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Non-Profit Company with registration number 2022/780255/08

The Directors of Let's Change Ba-Phalaborwa Community Forum (LCBP):

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Trevor van Rooyen – Vice Chairperson

Rodger Ferguson – Governance and Legislation

Kim Duverge – Secretary/Administrator

Danie Buys – Director

Prepared by:

Kim Duverge

Secretary/Administrator

Let's Change Ba-Phalaborwa

Date: May 2025