



MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, 17 August 2017

South Africa shivers in the grip of icy weather

A cold front moved over the Free State yesterday, 16 August 2017 and progressed further northwards through Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal overnight. In the wake of the advancing cold front, widespread rain occurred over the southern parts of the country, with the Eastern Cape bearing the brunt of the extreme wintery weather overnight. A cut-off low in the upper parts of the atmosphere is currently positioned over the eastern highlands of the country, contributing to the overall severity and intensity of this winter system.

The Eastern Cape has been very dry of late, experiencing much less rainfall than is usually the case, with many dams and reservoirs urgently in need of replenishment. This episode of rainfall, augmented by snowmelt in the days to come, will be most welcome for the Eastern Cape. Significant rainfall indeed occurred overnight across the Eastern Cape. Whilst falls were not particularly heavy (of the order of 30 or more mm in many places), further rainfall is expected today. In particular, heavier falls have occurred this morning, in and around the Port Alfred area and adjacent interior, where localised flooding may occur today.

Widespread snowfalls were also reported over high-lying terrain in the Eastern Cape. Consequently, many roads and mountain passes in the Eastern Cape are currently closed, as per the listing below. Further heavy snowfall, of the order of 2cm per hour is expected for the Winterberg region of Eastern Cape today.

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Pass closures due to SNOW as at 08H30SAST 17/08/2017

- 1) Wapadsberg Pass R61 between Cradock and Lootsberg
- 2) Lootsberg Pass N9 between Middelburg and Graaff Reniet
- 3) Barkly pass R58 between Elliot and Barkly East

Roads in the Eastern Cape which are currently deemed to be hazardous due to SNOW

- 1) R56 between Molteno and Dordrecht
- 2) Nico Malan Pass R67 in Seymour (Winterberg)
- 3) Kraairivier Pass between Barkly East and Elliot
- 4) Penhoek pass N6 between Queenstown and Jamestown
- 5) R58 between Barkly East and Lady Grey



Figure 1: Eastern Cape snowfall this morning. Many roads and mountain passes are closed as snowfalls persist today over the province. Image credit: Mr. Patrick Moko, Joe Gqabi District municipality.

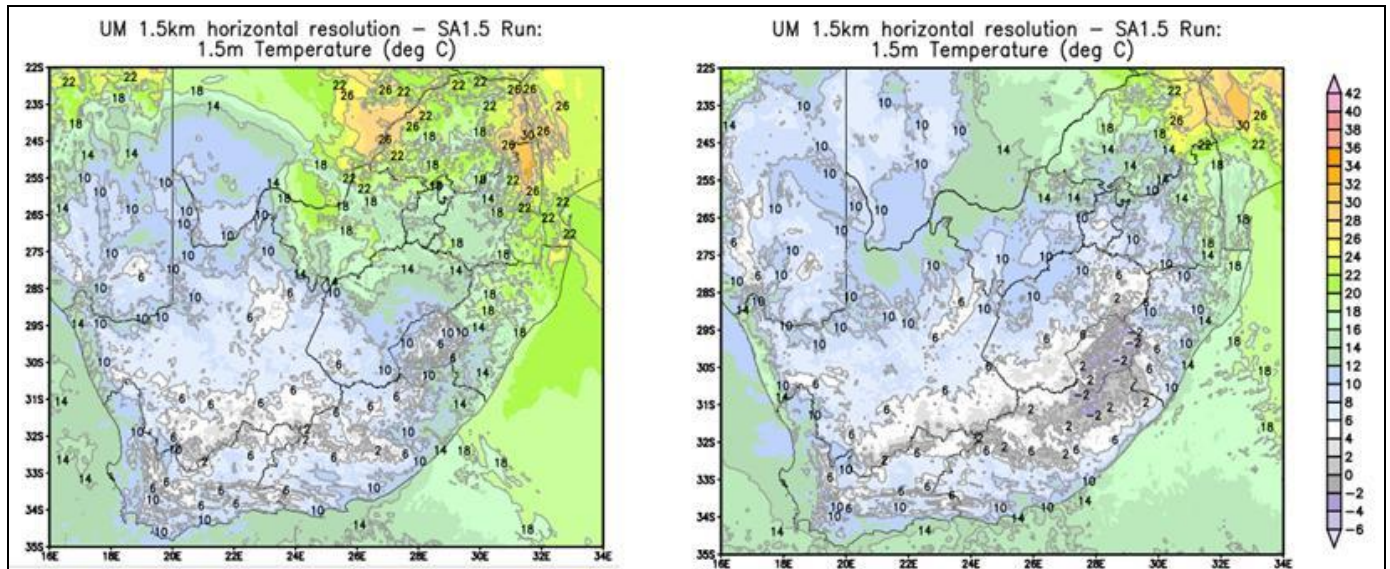


Figure 2: NWP (Unified Model) modelled screen temperature at 14h00SAST on 16 August 2017, illustrating the dramatic temperature change between Wednesday 16 August 2017 (at left) and Thursday 17 August 2017 (at right), as the cold front progressed across the country. The cold front passed through Gauteng last night, with the majority of the South African interior likely to experience a daytime maximum temperature of only 10 degrees Celsius, whilst many high-lying areas (especially in the Drakensberg) may only experience “single digit” (+1 to +9°C) maximums. As can be seen in the image on the right, some parts of Lesotho may even remain sub-zero, in terms of air temperature today.

Snowfalls of a disruptive nature can also be expected over extreme southern Free State, Lesotho as well as southern KwaZulu-Natal and even as far north as Van Reenen’s pass today and overnight tonight.

Along our coastal regions, south-westerly gales, accompanied by localised heavy rainfall are expected to spread progressively northwards along the eastern coast from East London, as far north as Maputo later today. Outbreaks of thundery weather can also be expected along parts of this coastline today.

The good news is that this intense winter system is expected to begin moving away from the country, even as early as tomorrow, 18 August 2017. While Friday will still see some residual snowfalls over the eastern Drakensberg, eastern parts of Eastern Cape and parts of KwaZulu-Natal, the system is expected to begin weakening and drifting eastwards towards the Indian ocean. Rainfall, strong winds and rough seas will still persist along the KwaZulu-Natal coastline during Friday, but are expected to ease off later in the day. The remainder of the provinces should however remain mostly dry and cloud-free on Friday.

South Africans can look forward to a predominantly sunny, dry and mild weekend, almost countrywide. Despite the anticipated recovery of daytime temperature, most localities over the interior of the country will experience very cold overnight conditions in the nights to come.

What is a cut-off low? A low pressure system, located in the upper portions of the atmosphere, which has separated away from the band of westerly winds in the upper-air which dominates the mid-latitudes of the northern and southern hemispheres respectively. During a relatively short life span (typically a duration of a few days) a cut-off low generally drifts equatorward (northwards) and develops winds which are oriented clockwise around the core (or vortex) of the low. Cut-off lows are a fairly common occurrence in the weather of South Africa, especially during the winter months. A cut off low is characterised by a cold core and is also referred to as an extra-tropical, mid-latitude cyclone. By contrast, tropical cyclones are an entirely different phenomenon, being characterised by a warm core and are restricted to tropical regions.

The South African Weather Service will continue to monitor further developments during this period and will issue subsequent updates as required. Furthermore, the general public is urged to regularly follow weather forecasts on television and radio. Updated information may also be accessed on www.weathersa.co.za as well as via the South African Weather Service Twitter account @SAWeatherService

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