

CHAPTER 8

POLICY REVIEW PHASE 3: MINISTERIAL CONSULTATION AND DECISION-MAKING (2005 - 2008)

With the delivery of the SANParks advisory report in September 2005, the policy development and decision-making process became the responsibility and concern of the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Marthinus van Schalkwyk.

Following the prescriptions of the Biodiversity Act, the Minister consulted with provincial authorities who emphasised³³:

- That all provinces, parks, and elephant ranges face similar challenges and that there is a pressing need for sustainable solutions to be found.
- The need for National Norms and Standards to define a flexible basket of management options including culling, contraception, translocation, conservation corridors, and reinforced and upgraded fences.
- The importance of creating such a national framework to empower the Minister and MECs to ultimately approve elephant management plans for individual parks.

A presentation on the elephant management policy challenge was made to Cabinet, who instructed Minister van Schalkwyk to draft and publish Norms and Standards, based on the recommended range of management options, for public comment. It was decided that the finalised Norms and Standards would then inform the drafting of location-specific elephant management plans for all national, provincial and private parks. Each plan would also require thorough consultation with all local stakeholders – thus effectively creating a two phase consultation and decision making process.

In various media statements the Minister expressed his intention that decisions about elephant management will be based on scientific research, ethical and social considerations, indigenous knowledge, and environmental and tourism impacts, at the same time recognising our global responsibility to act in the best interests of sustainable conservation.

In one of the first actions to follow The Minister and SANParks undertook an ‘international roadshow’ to present the content of the report to delegations in Europe and the USA and to gather their inputs. The Department of Foreign Affairs, SATourism, and the International Marketing Council of South Africa also took part in the programme which visited delegations in the UK, Holland, Switzerland, Italy, Germany and the USA.

When strong negative reaction arose to the SANParks report by some groups opposed to culling, SANParks was requested to step back from the subsequent policy development process to allow the Minister to conduct an independent consultative process, particularly with dissatisfied groups.

The Marula Tree Talks: NGOs meet the Minister

On 28 November 2005 Minister van Schalkwyk hosted 17 local and international stakeholder groups at a meeting at Kirstenbosch, Cape Town. This included many of the groups opposed to culling, as well as leading conservation NGOs. Following these talks 7 of the organisations present – Birdlife SA, Botanical Society of SA, Elephant Management and Owners Association, Endangered Wildlife Trust, WESSA, Wilderness Foundation and WWF-SA – came out in support of SANParks proposal to manage elephant populations as a precautionary measure to protect biodiversity. In this they stated their agreement that in the absence of any other feasible alternative culling is currently the most viable short-term management option, though long term solutions must also be pursued³⁴.

Science Round Table I

Scientists present at the Marula Tree Talks had suggested to the Minister that further expert discussion regarding the necessity of intervention in South Africa's elephant populations should take place. In addition, other participants in the ministerial consultation process had again raised the concern that there was little consensus about the elephant management 'problem' or an appropriate 'solution'. This led the Minister to appoint an issue manager who assembled a panel of experts to discuss the need and urgency for intervention in South Africa's elephant populations. The panel – termed the Elephant Science Round Table – met on 18 January 2006 in Cape Town, and was asked to demonstrate the scientific evidence in support of or against a number of propositions such as:

- Are there too many elephants?
- Are they causing damage to biodiversity?
- Is action needed to reduce populations?
- Which management options are most appropriate?

The panel comprised ten leading elephant scientists:

- PROFESSOR NORMAN OWEN-SMITH - Research Professor in African Ecology at the University of the Witwatersrand.
- PROFESSOR RUDI VAN AARDE - Professor of Zoology and Director of the Conservation Research Unit in the Faculty of Natural & Agricultural Science, University of Pretoria.
- PROFESSOR GRAHAM KERLEY - Director, Terrestrial Ecology Research Unit, Department of Zoology, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
- DR HECTOR MAGOME - Head of Research, South African National Parks
- DR IAN WHYTE - Research Manager: Large Herbivores, South African National Parks.
- DR DAVID CUMMING - Tropical Resource Ecology Programme, University of Zimbabwe.
- BRUCE PAGE - Lecturer in Ecology in the School of Conservation and Biological Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- PROFESSOR ROB SLOTOW – Professor, School of Conservation and Biological Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- DR BOB SCHOLES - Systems Ecologist, Council for Scientific and Industrial Research.
- DR BRIAN HUNTLEY (CHAIR) – Director, South African National Biodiversity Institute.

The panel concluded that there was no compelling evidence to suggest the need for immediate, large-scale reduction of elephant numbers in the Kruger National Park, but that in some protected areas, some intervention might be necessary to manage elephant density, distribution and population structure³⁵.

The need for ongoing research was emphasised and the panel proposed that a representative science advisory panel should be established to design and fund an accelerated elephant research programme.

Science Round Table II

The first round table was not able to cover all areas of concern, and on 22 August 2006 the issue manager brought three new members to a second Round Table:

- DR HOLLY DUBLIN - Chair, Species Survival Commission, IUCN - The World Conservation Union.
- DR IAIN DOUGLAS HAMILTON - Chief Executive of Save the Elephants
- PROFESSOR KEVIN ROGERS - Professor of Ecology at the University of the Witwatersrand and facilitator of the Luiperdskloof Science Workshop.

Participants were requested to consider the following questions:

- What scientific interventions are required for the implementation of an adaptive management research programme in the near future?
- How would a multi-stakeholder research programme be set up and administered?
- How would it work in practice?
- How much will it cost - and over what time period should it operate?
- Who should monitor the process and how would what was learnt be absorbed into elephant management policy and practice?

On conclusion of their meeting, the panel issued a “statement of scientific consensus” as follows³⁵:

1. **African elephants are an important component of South Africa’s biological diversity, both as a species in their own right, and as agents of change in the ecosystem.** Due to this role, the absence of elephants from ecosystems that evolved under their influence is potentially deleterious, as is their overabundance. Elephant impacts need to be managed as components of the ecosystem.
2. **The management of elephant influence on ecosystems takes place within the context of human society and its objectives.** Social, environmental, economic and political values, must be brought to bear on decision making.
3. **Decisions on managing elephants are dependent on stated land use objectives, the techniques by which this can be practically achieved being situation-specific.** Influencing factors are the size of the area involved; conservation value of the elephant population; biodiversity, social and economic values of the area. A single, uniform set of rules for elephant management is not desirable, but a differentiated and evolving best practice guideline for various circumstances is achievable.
4. **Elephants in confined populations can, in the absence of interventions, cause changes to the composition, structure and functioning of ecosystems in which they occur.** These changes may be unacceptable. It is possible that sustained high elephant

impact will cause the local extinction of sensitive species in the affected areas, and if those constitute the major populations for the species, could lead to their endangerment or extinction.

5. **Excluding extinctions, elephant-induced changes to the ecosystem are potentially reversible.** The time period for which elephant influences are apparent may exceed a human generation (30 years), for example if it requires the regrowth of large trees or the regeneration of lost soil.
6. **Elephants have a high level of social organisation and consciousness.** Behavioural consequences or objectives of management intervention should be well considered. Their management therefore requires particularly high ethical standards. Science can contribute an understanding of behaviour and measures of stress to the formulation of these standards.
7. **The state of knowledge regarding some important aspects of elephant management requires further research.** In particular, the likely trajectory of elephant numbers, the relationship between elephant density and a range of ecological consequences in various ecosystems, and the viability under various circumstances of elephant density control using contraception and habitat manipulation need further research. An active adaptive management approach, including a targeted research programme, is indicated as a strategy for combining timely action with learning.

Minister Van Schalkwyk thanked the panel for their statement of consensus and invited the scientists to develop a comprehensive proposal for a long-term research programme. It was agreed that this would be undertaken under the leadership of South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).

National Norms and Standards for Elephant Management in South Africa

In March 2007, based on the preceding policy review and Round Table processes, the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism published draft Norms and Standards for elephant management in South Africa³⁶. The 30 day response period required by legislation was extended to 60 days to allow more time for stakeholders to comment. Some 80 submissions were received, some up to 50 pages in length. The Norms and Standards were revised in accordance with these responses and published in February 2008³⁷.

The national Norms and Standards are intended to ensure that:

- Elephants are managed in the Republic in a way that:
 - o ensures the long term survival of elephants within the ecosystem in which they occur or may occur in future;
 - o promotes broader biodiversity and socio-economic goals and are ecologically, socially, politically and economically sustainable;
 - o does not disrupt the ecological integrity of the ecosystems in which elephants occur;
 - o enables the achievement of specific management objectives of protected areas, registered game farms, private or communal land; and
 - o is ethical and humane and recognising their sentient nature, highly organised social structure and ability to communicate,
- The management of elephants is regulated in a way that-

- is uniform across the Republic; and
- takes into account the Republic's international obligations in terms of international agreements on biodiversity management binding on the Republic; and
- The management of elephants is regulated in accordance with national policies on biodiversity management and sustainable development.

The Norms and Standards allow, with certain provisos, for consideration of the following management options should they be considered necessary to achieve the objectives of a particular park:

To manage the size, composition or rate of growth of a wild elephant population:

- Contraception
- Range manipulation (management of water or food supply, controlled use of fire, fencing, creation of corridors of movement between different areas; or range expansion)
- Translocation
- Culling

To manage the distribution of a wild elephant population within the boundaries of the area:

- Contraception
- Range manipulation (management of water or food supply, controlled use of fire, fencing, creation of corridors of movement between different areas; or range expansion)
- Translocation