

Media Release - 18 December 2000

Cellular Telephones in National Parks - Public Opinion Survey

The use of cellular telephones in National Parks has become a controversial matter and it appears that opinions regarding this are divergent. The SANP (South African National Parks) is the custodian of the National Parks System on behalf of the people of South Africa and in terms of the appropriate legislation it is deemed necessary to undertake a "Public Opinion Survey" in this regard (a briefing document and questionnaire concerning this matter is attached).

The above mentioned survey is to be conducted over the festive season and until the end of February 2001. Questionnaires will be available at all National Parks with tourism facilities and other SANP offices. Participation will also be possible by way of the SANP website.

Members of the public are urged to participate in this survey to enable the SANP to address this issue in an appropriate manner.

Further queries can be directed to Mr Murray Macgregor (Head: Environmental Services SANP) or Ms Judy Jennings on telephone 012-426-5000 or Fax 012-343-2832.

PLEASE GIVE US YOUR VIEWS BY FILLING IN THE ATTACHED [QUESTIONNAIRE](#)

BACKGROUND DOCUMENT TO QUESTIONNAIRE

Please take a few minutes of your time and complete the attached questionnaire, as your opinion is important to the South African National Parks (SANP). The National Parks are "National Assets" of which the people of South Africa are the shareholders and hence your input on this controversial matter is important. Please return by no later than 28/2/2001 to either of the addresses as documented below.

INTRODUCTION - WHY THIS QUESTIONNAIRE?

The use of cellular phones in National Parks has become a controversial matter and it appears that visitors to the National Parks and public opinion in this regard is divergent. Preliminary indications are that the public opinion on this issue can broadly be divided into four categories namely:

Category 1 - Those wanting cellular usage in National Parks for various reasons (safety, business etc).

Category 2 - Those who propose restricted use of such phones in National Parks.

Category 3 - Those not wanting the use of such technology in the National Parks.

Category 4 - Those who are undecided, or have no interest or opinion concerning this matter.

WHY THE PUBLIC OPINION? OBLIGATIONS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL PARKS (SANP) IN TERMS OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION

The mandate of the SANP is to establish and manage a system of National Parks representative of the Bio-diversity of the country on behalf of and for the benefit of the people of South Africa. The SANP is bound by various Environmental Legislation including the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA), the Environment Conservation Act (EIA Regulations R1182/3 Procedures and Guidelines) and the Principles of IEM (Integrated Environmental Management) which are also taken up in NEMA. The SANP is also bound by the provisions of the National Parks Act whose "Objectives Clause" states "The object of the constitution of a park is the establishment, preservation and study therein of wild animal... in such a manner that the area, which constitutes the park shall, as

far as may be and for the benefit and enjoyment of visitors, be retained in its natural state."

The establishment of a cellular network within a National Park is a listed activity in terms of the EIA (Environmental Impact Assessment) Regulations of September 1997 and hence an appropriate Environmental Investigation must be undertaken in this regard. The legislation also requires that all I&AP's (Interested and Affected Parties) be consulted by way of a Public Participation Process (PPP). In this particular instance and due to the sensitivity of this matter the PPP is to include an assessment of Public Opinion of the usage of cell-phones in National Parks, The purpose of this questionnaire is to assist in facilitating this process.

SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION AND ISSUES PERTINANT TO THIS MATTER INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

PUBLIC PHONES IN NATIONAL PARKS - CURRENT STATUS: The majority of National Parks (except Marakele, Vaalbos) have either card and/or coin operated public telephones. All the major camps in the Kruger National Park (KNP) have the same (recently however some problems have been experienced with the Telkom system due to theft of solar panels in the KNP).

CELL PHONES IN NATIONAL PARKS - CURRENT STATUS:

KRUGER NATIONAL PARK (KNP): The following camps in the KNP receive (or are planned to receive) cell phone coverage -Skukuza, (Phase 1) Letaba, Satara, and Pretoriuskop (Phase 2) Berg-en-dal, Punda Maria, Mopani, Crocodile Bridge (Phase 3) Lower Sabie, Olifants, Shingwedzi, (Phase 4) - Phase 1 and 2 were constructed prior to the EIA Regulations Phase 3 after the enactment of the regulations and Phase 4 is pending. When cell phones were first considered in the KNP it was under the following conditions: coverage would be limited to the camps concerned (in reality coverage extends to various distances from the camps), that only one mast would be permitted and that a rationalization of masts would occur, that all such associated masts would be withdrawn when satellite technology became available (the status of such technology is uncertain and note should be made of the fact that a leading American company in this field has recently gone insolvent and a large number of satellites are being decommissioned -the cost factor is also an issue to be considered in respect to satellite technology).

OTHER PARKS: Cellular coverage in other National Parks varies from no coverage, partial or limited coverage (i.e. CPNP, Augrabies etc) through to full coverage (i.e. Knysna) by way of mainly peripheral but in some cases internal infrastructure.

SOME OF THE NEGATIVE IMPACTS ASSOCIATED WITH CELLPHONES: Some of the impacts sited as being associated with cellphones include but are not limited to the following:

Visual (aesthetic) impact of the infrastructure (i.e. towers etc) (limited mitigation is possible in this respect), - acoustic (noise) and nuisance impacts.

Impact on "sense of place / wilderness experience" of cellphones in natural / protected areas such as National Parks who many consider to be retreats to get away from the pressures of modern life and such technology. The IUCN (International Union for the Conservation of Nature) recommendations for protected areas are that at least 10% of a country's area should be set aside for such purposes. In South Africa at present only approximately 5.8% of the land has been set aside for conservation purposes and only 2.5 to 3 % are National Parks. Many therefore argue that there is so little land not transformed by man and the little there is remaining must be kept in a pristine state according to the National Parks Act.

Impacts on game viewing and safety aspects on walking trails where the safety of trailists in dangerous game areas can be compromised by cellphones.

Consider the following scenario as an example: I came across two lion in close proximity to the road in a prime photographic position. I was the only car present at the time and shortly after positioning myself in a good vantage position and turning off my engine a vehicle approached from the other direction. On seeing the lion the driver

pulled up and immediately got on a cellphone to other visitors at a picnic spot approximately 5 km away which in a short time resulted in the arrival of approximately another 8 vehicles which impacted seriously on this siting and my photographic endeavors and resulted in the disturbance of the lion who due to the disturbance moved away and out of view.

SOME OF THE POSITIVE ASPECTS CITED IN RESPECT TO CELLPHONES IN NATIONAL PARKS:

These include:

- Communication in general (business and other) - the argument against this being that public phones are available in camps.
- Security /emergency reasons (dangerous animals, breakdown of vehicle, etc) - the argument above also applies as well as if rules are applied no one is in danger of animals and facilities have existed for years to deal with vehicle break downs).
- Management function of the National Parks - argument has also raised that the KNP and other Parks for instance have been managed very well for many years without this technology.
- Medical emergencies.

Consider the following scenario as an example: The gates of the camp at which you are staying are to close within a short period and you have just encountered car problems approximately 1,5 km from camp. You are in possession of a cellphone and are able to contact camp to inform them of your problem. This prevents the possibility of you having to spend an uncomfortable night in your vehicle.

ARE THEIR ALTERNATIVES?

Land Lines:

As indicated previously the majority of National Parks and the main camps in the KNP have public phones (landlines). Visitors to the parks are thus able to phone outside of parks at any time. The downside of public telephones of course is the potential of having to queue.

Satellite Technology:

This technology does not rely on masts, but on small reception dishes similar to digital satellite television (DST) and hence the visual impact of the infrastructure is reduced. On the other hand, this technology may allow coverage of entire parks by cellphone users, which would potentially broaden the "nuisance impact" of cellphone use by visitors. Due to cost and other factors as discussed above the status of this technology as an alternative is currently uncertain.

Restricted use Scenarios:

Technological advances in telecommunications (i.e. the advent of microcells - Pico Cells and Premi Cells) can facilitate microwave restrictions whereby reception can be limited to a small area like for instance a shopping complex. In terms of the National Parks it would therefore be technically feasible to restrict reception to a camp or even part of a camp (i.e. the Reception area for instance) thus limiting some of the negative impacts associated with such technology as discussed above.

Please complete the attached questionnaire and return it by either:

1. Posting it to Mr M Macgregor (Head: Environmental Services SANP) at South African National Parks, Box 787, Pretoria, 0001. (Mark for the attention of Ms J Jennings) **or**
2. Faxing it to Mr Macgregor as per the above - Fax Number (012) 343-2832 or e-mail judyj@parks-sa.co.za **or**

3. Returning it to the Reception or Gate Staff at the appropriate Camp/National Park for forwarding to (1) above.

The questionnaire may also be accessed and completed on the South African National Parks website on http://www.parks-sa.co.za/cell_questionnaire.htm

NOTE: Submissions should reach the SANP before 28 February 2001. Written submissions are also welcome and these should also be addressed to 1 or 2 above.

Further details can be obtained from Mr M Macgregor at (012) 426-5209 or Ms Judy Jennings at (012) 426-5218.

[\[back\]](#) [\[top\]](#)