

MEDIA RELEASE - 16 September 2002

"NO TROPHY HUNTING IN KRUGER"

On Sunday (15 September 2002) a false and alarmist story about proposed hunting in the Kruger National Park (KNP) was published by the Rapport newspaper and touched the raw nerve of the nation. The KNP is the nation's icon that we should all be proud of and protect with our lives should the need arise. It is synonymous to patriotism and anyone that willfully set out to harm its image or what it stands for tries our nation's patience beyond the limit.

The park's core competency is threefold; biodiversity conservation, provisioning of public benefits through ecotourism and building a constituency for conservation. The Rapport's article alleges that SANParks plans to introduce trophy hunting in the KNP as part of its commercialisation policy and raise R 57 million. Nothing could be further from the truth. Hunting does not feature at all in our mandate and vocabulary. The National Parks Act categorically prevents hunting in national parks. There are no plans to amend the Act to accommodate hunting as an option for fund raising.

It is a truism that there exist pressure groups out there who have an axe to grind with the KNP. They are also raising funds and their profiles by indulging in dirty tricks campaigns posing as a "saviour" of the Kruger from commercialisation. The park is not facing any threat from within or without as purported in their report entitled "*The Killing of a National Park*" distributed at the World Summit for Sustainable Development at Nasrec in Johannesburg recently. The authenticity and accuracy of the facts contained in that report are highly questionable and refutable. We don't know who *Xwe* is. We've never had contact with them on any issue that they might have against our conservation strategies. Our ecotourism is intertwined with conservation. It is therefore impossible to overlook either of the two competencies as *Xwe* claims. This shows their naivety in how the KNP is managed.

Our commercialisation strategy is based on sound environmental management principles. There are checks and balances to ensure that the environment does not end up like in some nature reserves and national parks in Africa, which have been trampled to oblivion by wholesale off-road driving and mass tourism. Quality assurance and environmental audit specialists are being employed to monitor the concessionaires' activities. There are strict measures to be observed and integrated environmental management programmes to guide the entire operation of the concessions are in place. The concessions are at various stages of development under the strict supervision of the national Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. Concessions are not new in protected areas and they are practiced elsewhere in the world for the benefit of biodiversity conservation. We have studied how other agencies have missed the target and we do not intend to repeat such mistakes in South Africa.

SANParks' official record does not reflect a discussion of hunting as a proposed fund-raising strategy in any of our national parks. It is clear that this opportunistic and faceless group is trying to gain fame at the expense of the KNP by ruining the park's national and international reputation as a conservation and ecotourism icon. Hunting in Kruger is not an option yesterday, today and in future. The nation, which is the sole shareholder of the park, will never allow it, come hell or high water.

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[<back>](#)