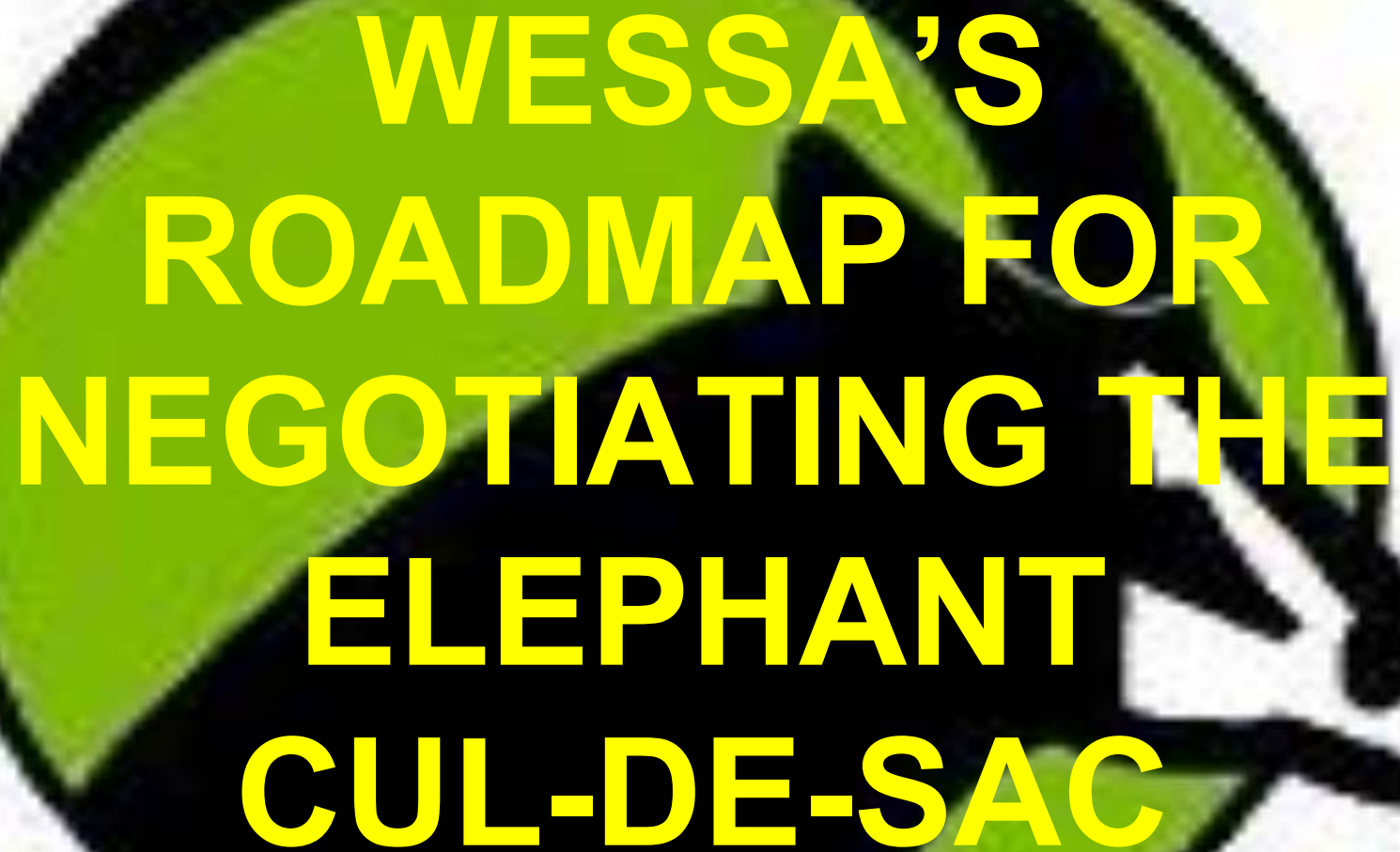




**WILDLIFE AND
ENVIRONMENT
SOCIETY OF SA**

People caring for the Earth



**WESSA'S
ROADMAP FOR
NEGOTIATING THE
ELEPHANT
CUL-DE-SAC**



BEL AIR

4

BALTIMORE

27

RIGHT LANE

DO NOT

ENTER

YIELD



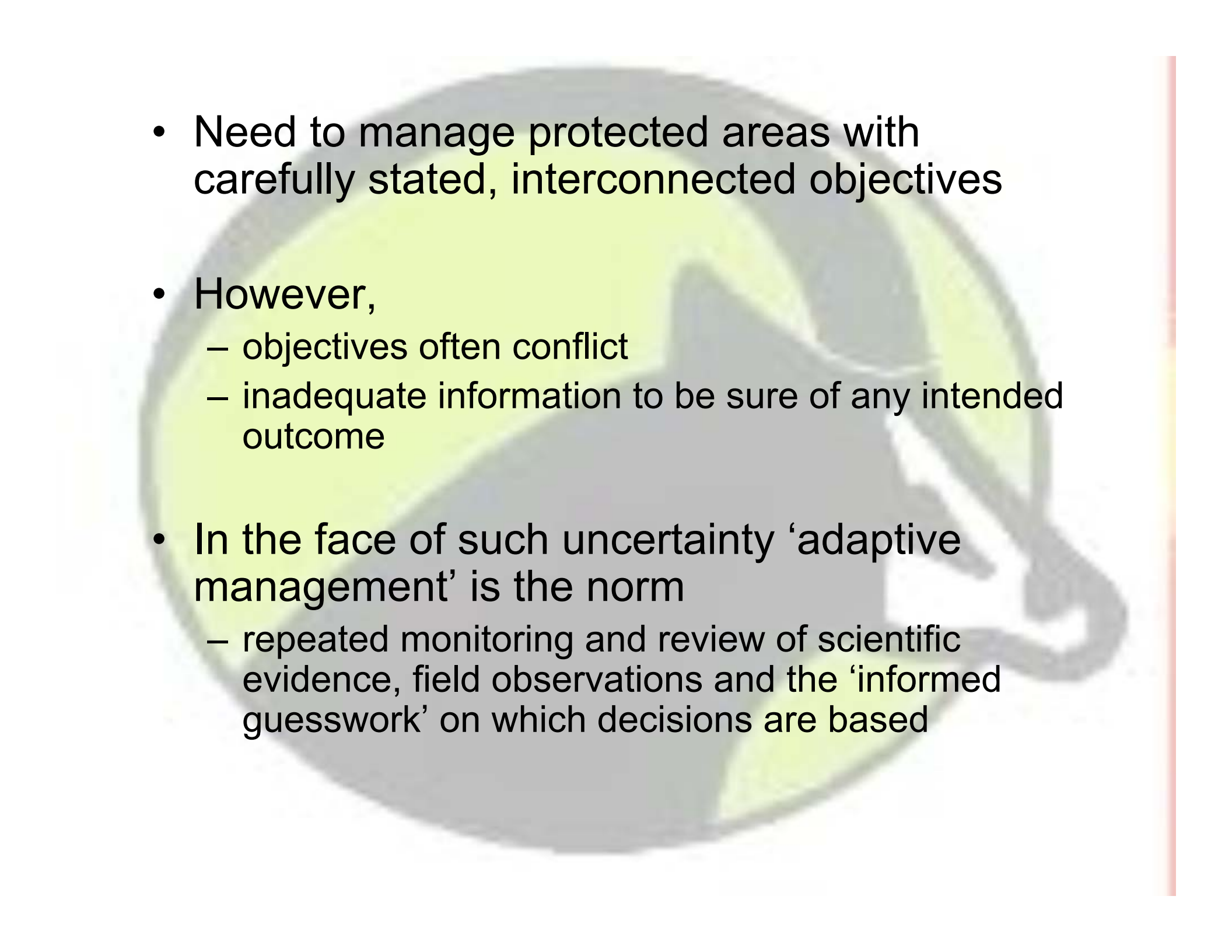
ONLY
ONE LANE
ROAD
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500
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ONE WAY

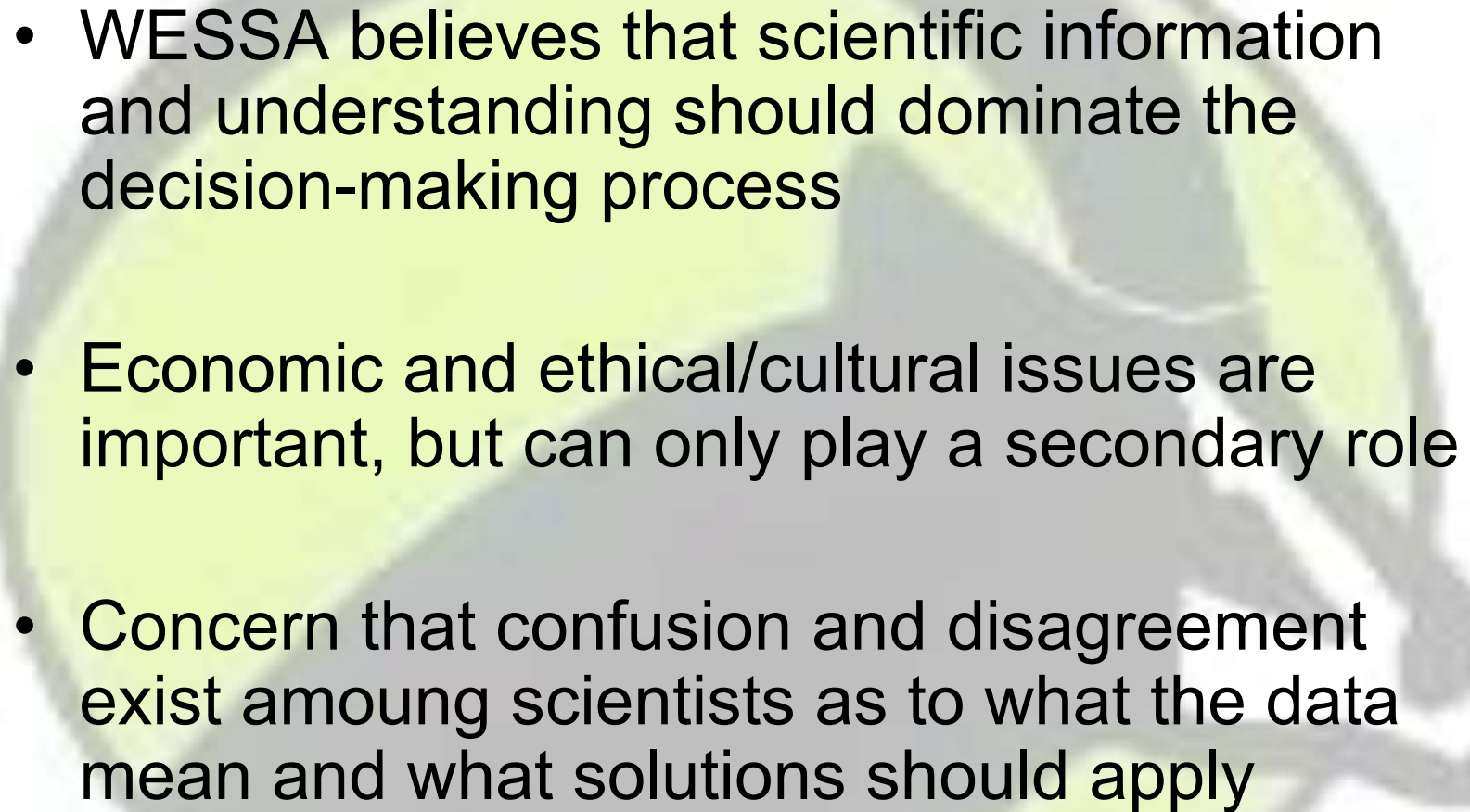
Background

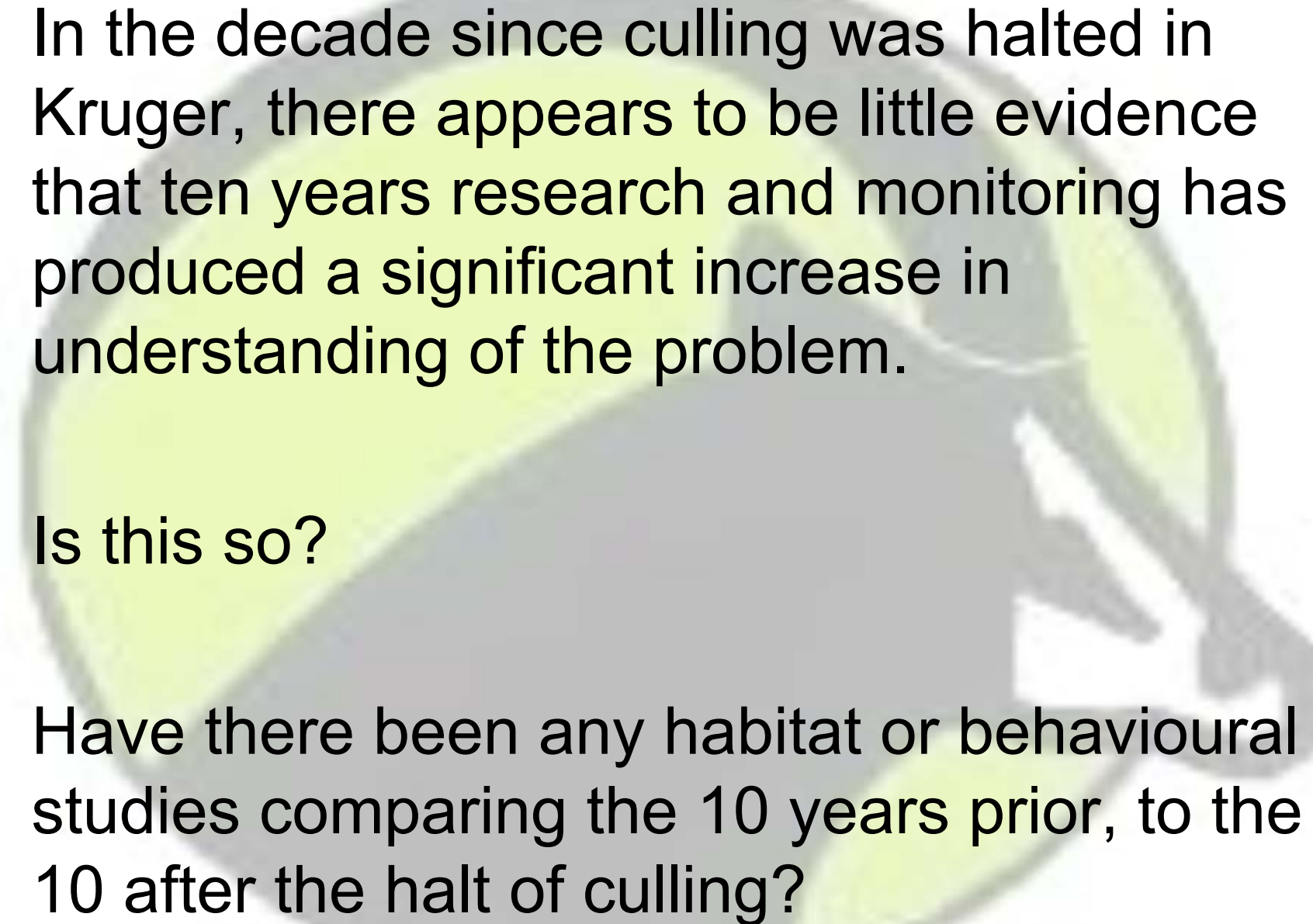
- WESSA represents informed public opinion on environmental and conservation issues
- Conservation policies based on scientific knowledge
- Practical and sensitive to needs and norms of society
- Views in line with World Conservation Union (founder member)

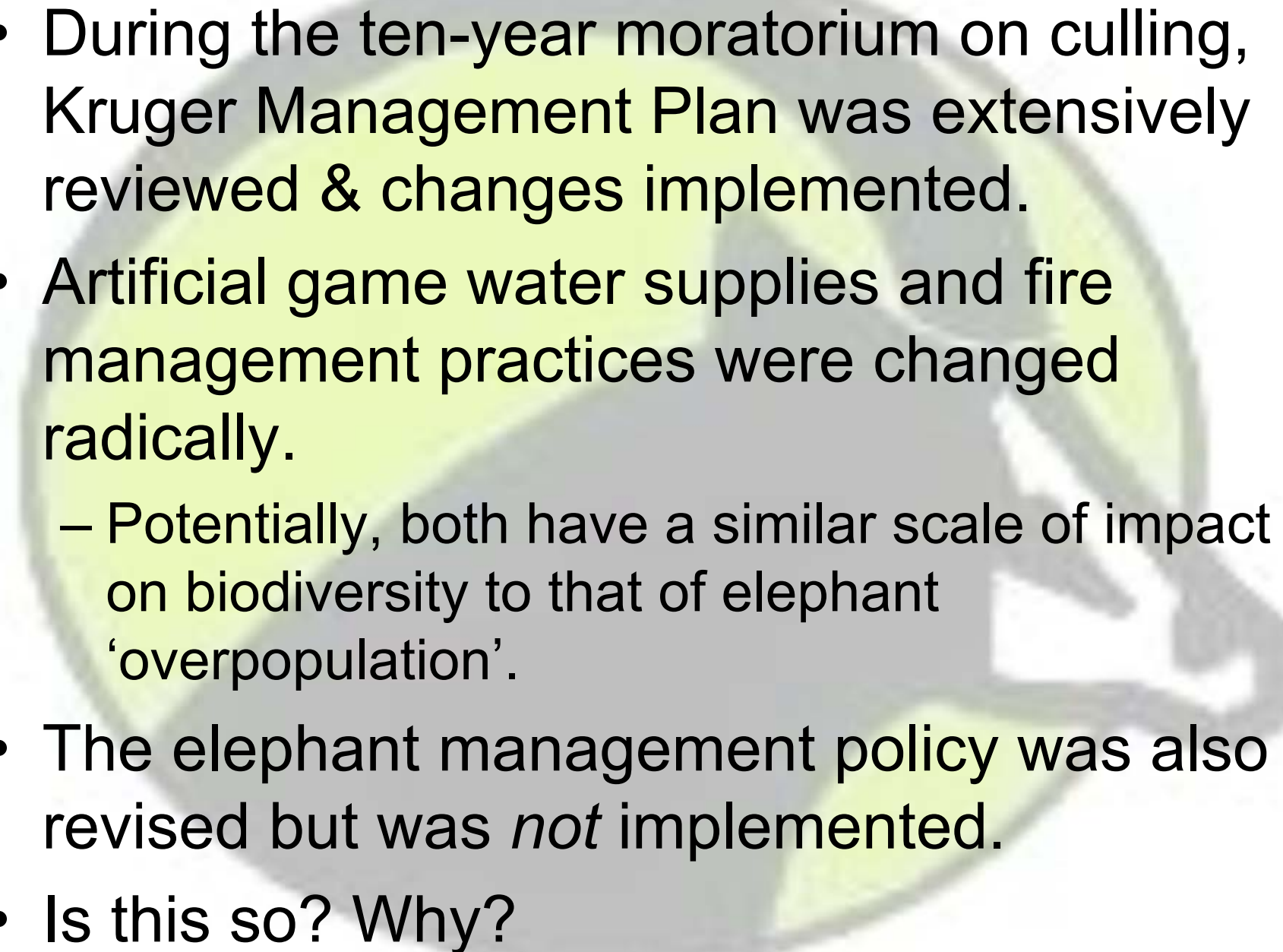
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- Need to manage protected areas with carefully stated, interconnected objectives
 - However,
 - objectives often conflict
 - inadequate information to be sure of any intended outcome
 - In the face of such uncertainty ‘adaptive management’ is the norm
 - repeated monitoring and review of scientific evidence, field observations and the ‘informed guesswork’ on which decisions are based

Indicators for resolving the KNP elephant problem

- Nature and complexity of the elephant problem in Kruger makes decision-making difficult
- WESSA held a discussion forum in Nelspruit to help inform the interested public – this talk is based on information from that event

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- WESSA believes that scientific information and understanding should dominate the decision-making process
 - Economic and ethical/cultural issues are important, but can only play a secondary role
 - Concern that confusion and disagreement exist among scientists as to what the data mean and what solutions should apply

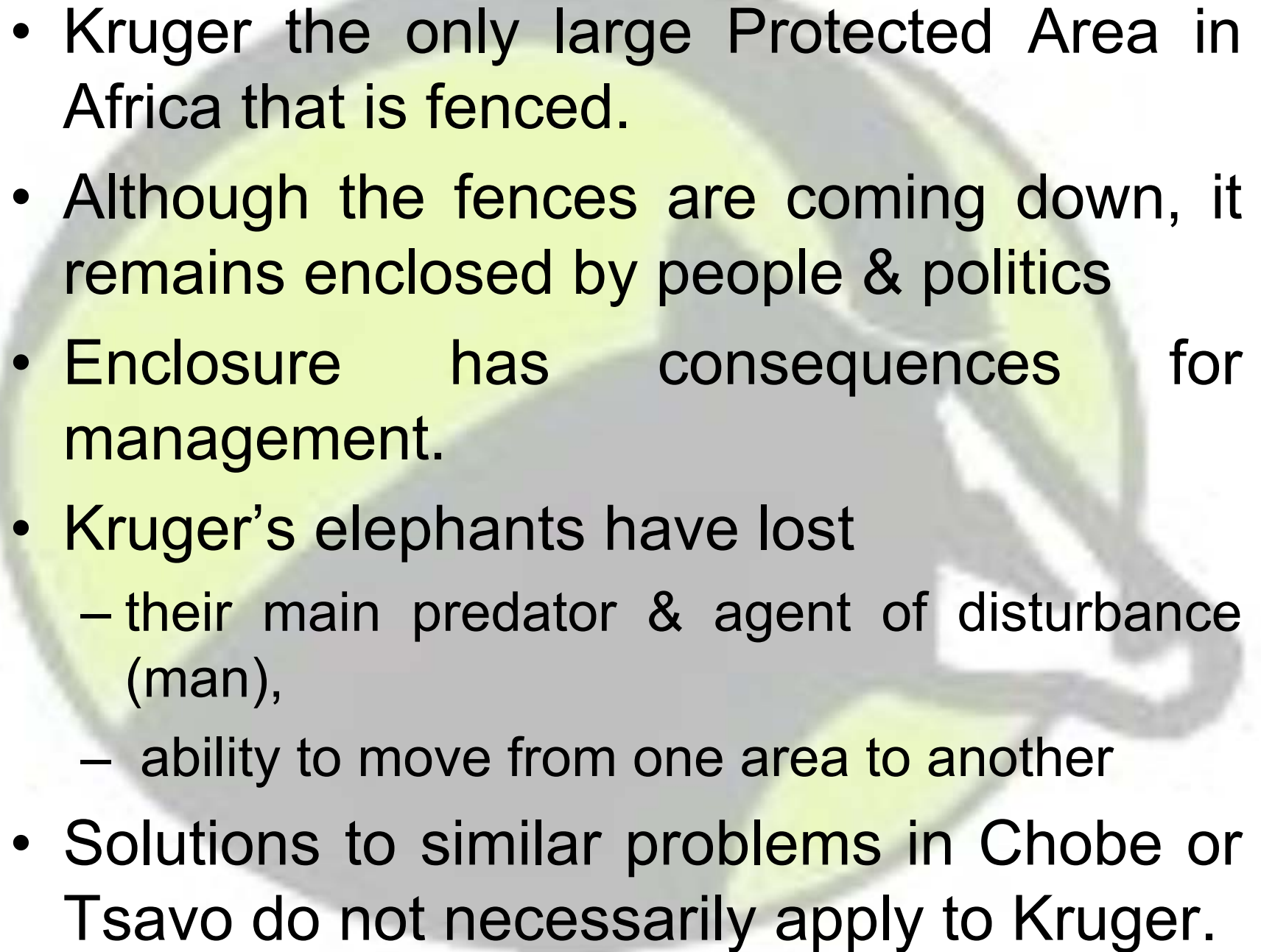
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- In the decade since culling was halted in Kruger, there appears to be little evidence that ten years research and monitoring has produced a significant increase in understanding of the problem.
 - Is this so?
 - Have there been any habitat or behavioural studies comparing the 10 years prior, to the 10 after the halt of culling?

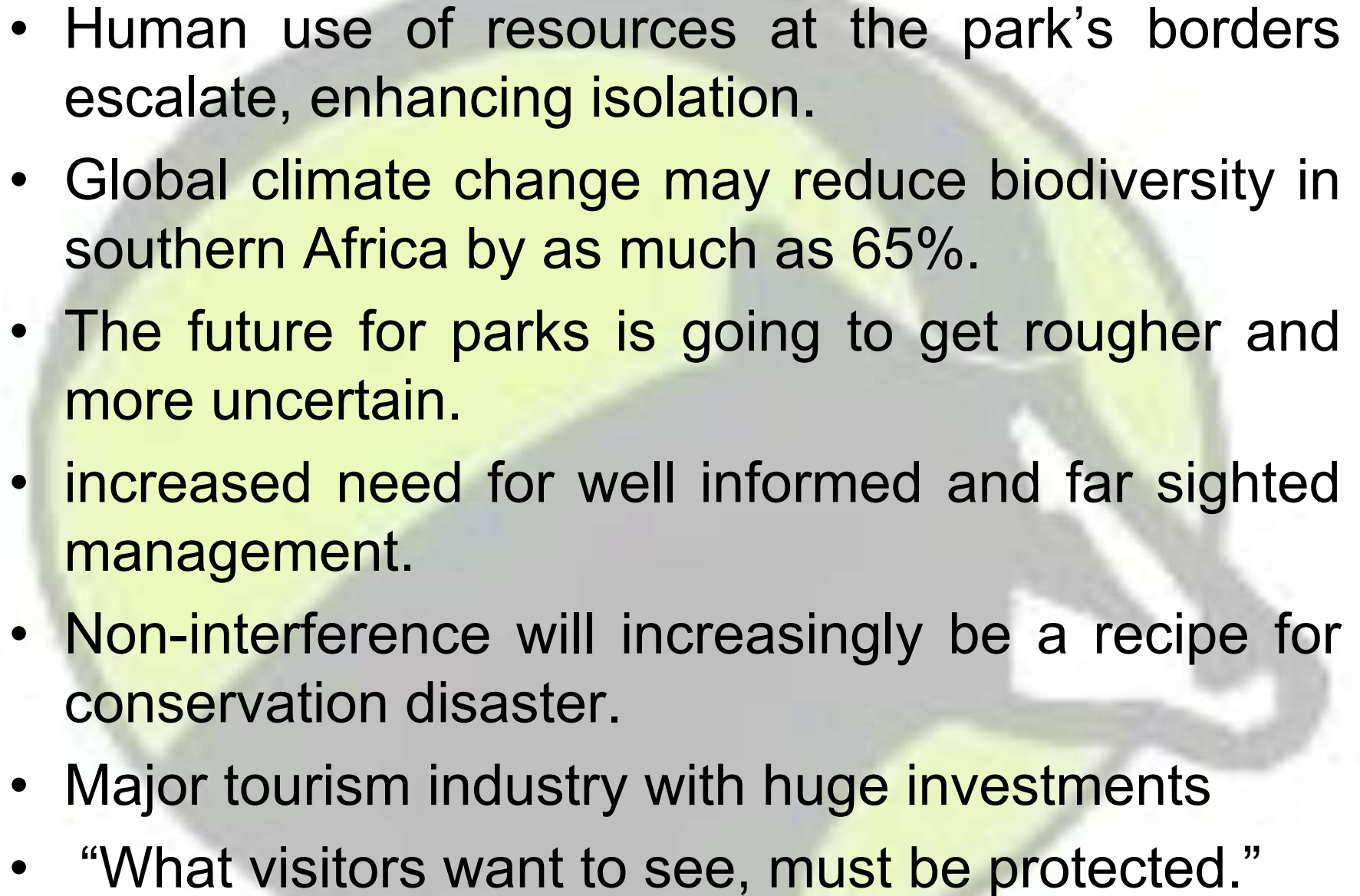
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- During the ten-year moratorium on culling, Kruger Management Plan was extensively reviewed & changes implemented.
 - Artificial game water supplies and fire management practices were changed radically.
 - Potentially, both have a similar scale of impact on biodiversity to that of elephant ‘overpopulation’.
 - The elephant management policy was also revised but was *not* implemented.
 - Is this so? Why?

- 
- The Nelspruit debate left one with a sense of confusion.
 - Researchers with management responsibility favour culling
 - External researchers suggested the opposite.
 - Both groups have their biases,
 - associated with their sources of finance and the strings attached.
 - need to justify their salaries and track records.
 - It is quite normal within institutional cultures to subtly encourage scientists to ‘prove’ a particular management decision as sound and beneficial.

What are the alternatives?

- For the purpose of *significantly reducing Kruger's present elephant density*; practical alternatives to culling may not exist.
- The range extension option.
artificial water-points ?!
- Promising contraceptive technologies
 - Side effects have not been properly tested

- 
- Kruger the only large Protected Area in Africa that is fenced.
 - Although the fences are coming down, it remains enclosed by people & politics
 - Enclosure has consequences for management.
 - Kruger's elephants have lost
 - their main predator & agent of disturbance (man),
 - ability to move from one area to another
 - Solutions to similar problems in Chobe or Tsavo do not necessarily apply to Kruger.

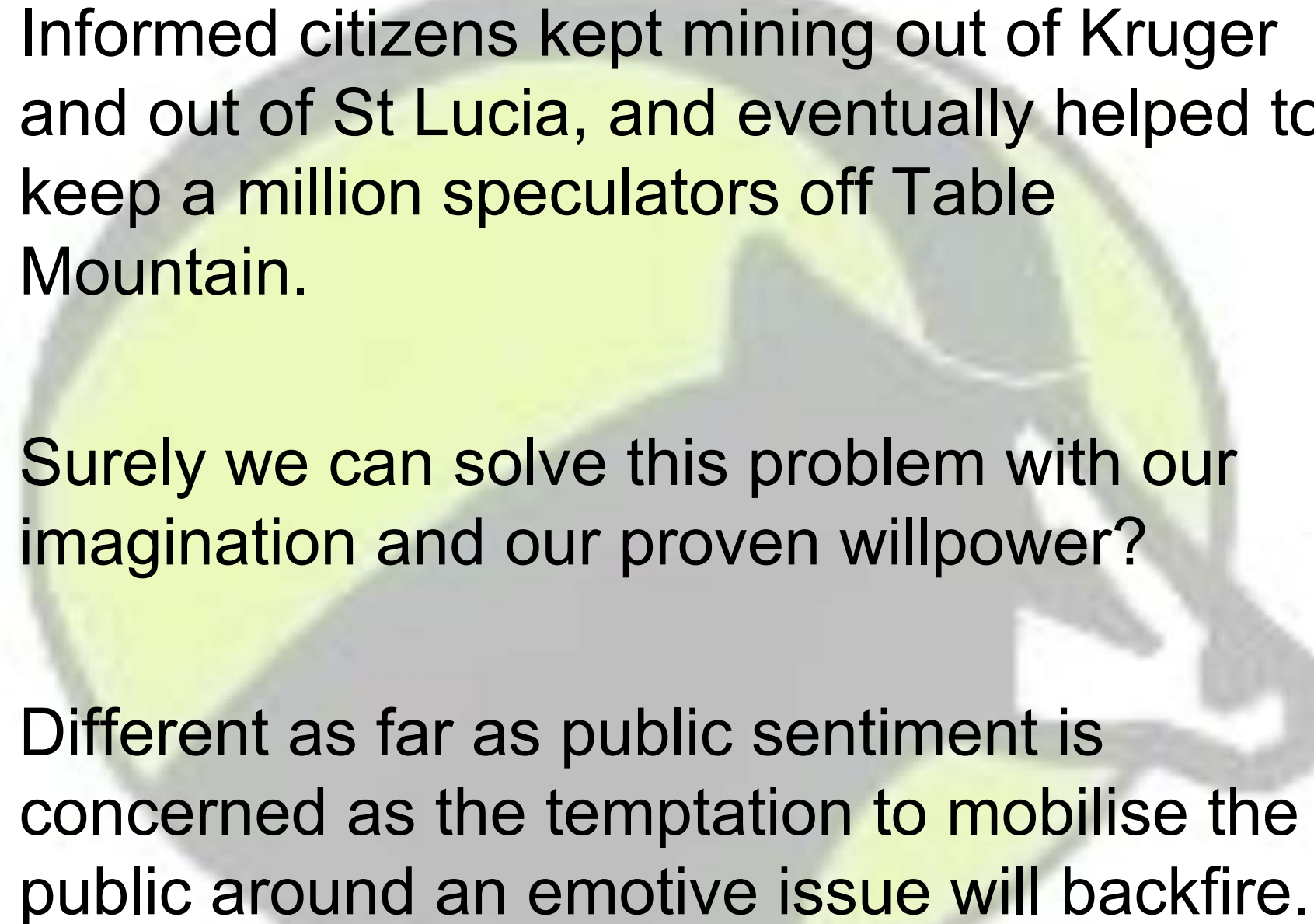
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- Human use of resources at the park's borders escalate, enhancing isolation.
 - Global climate change may reduce biodiversity in southern Africa by as much as 65%.
 - The future for parks is going to get rougher and more uncertain.
 - increased need for well informed and far sighted management.
 - Non-interference will increasingly be a recipe for conservation disaster.
 - Major tourism industry with huge investments
 - “What visitors want to see, must be protected.”

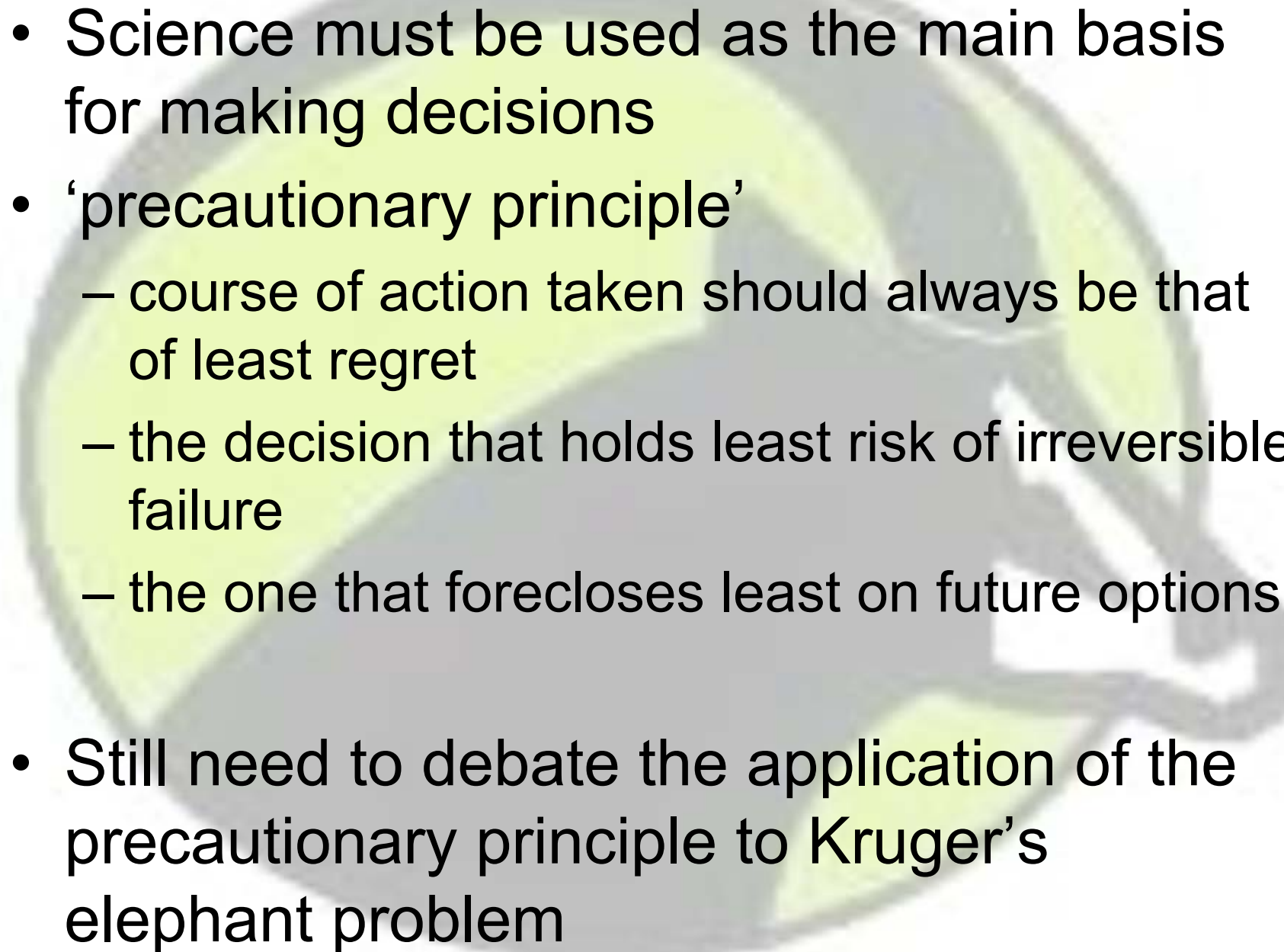
Socio-economic and ethical issues

- WESSA advocates high ethical standards, based on universal rather than personal values.
- Consumptive use is legitimate.
 - must be done humanely and based on real need and good science.
 - must be openly and honestly justified to all interested parties.
 - planned sustainable use cannot be being aligned with the causes of extinction

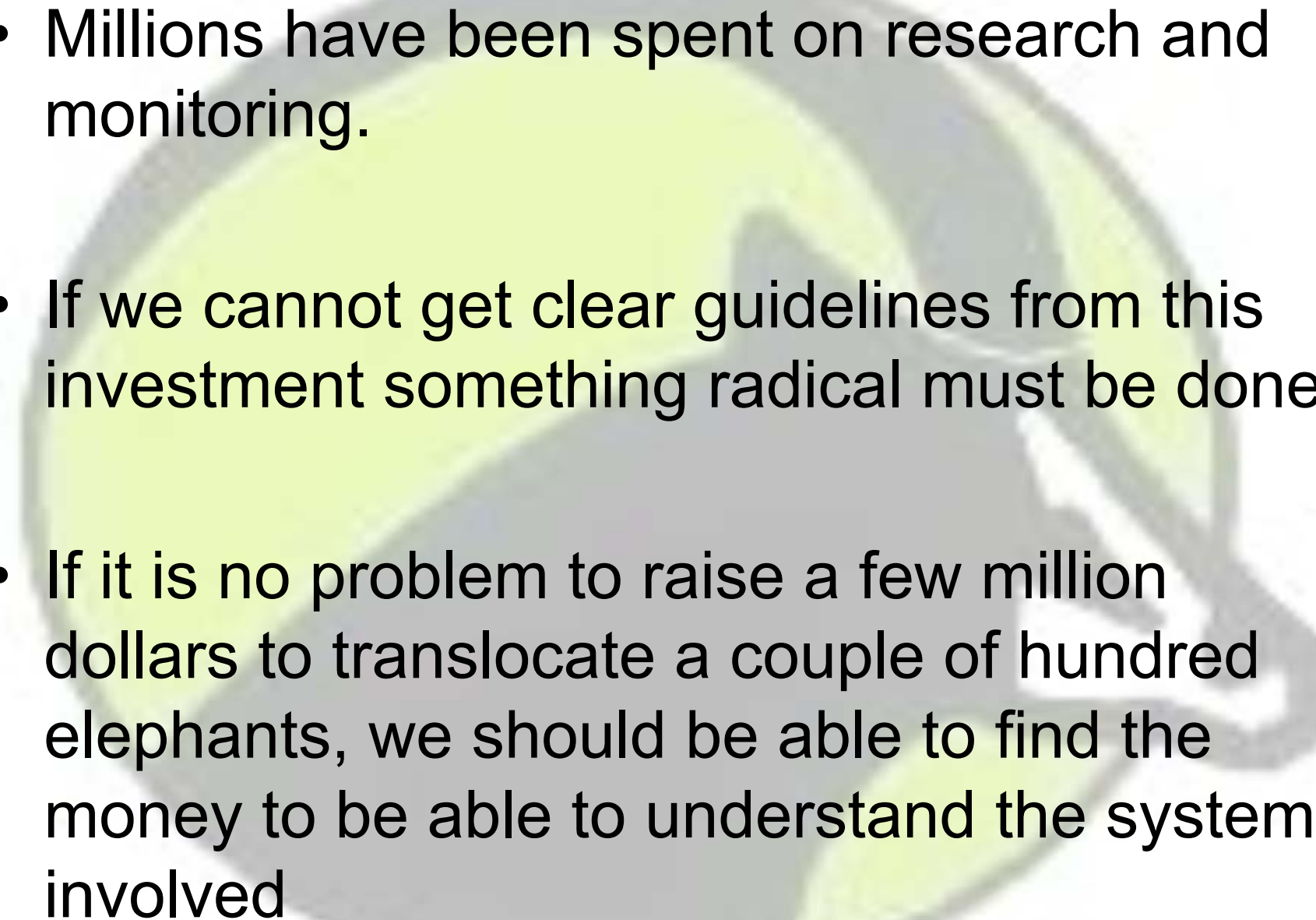
The road ahead

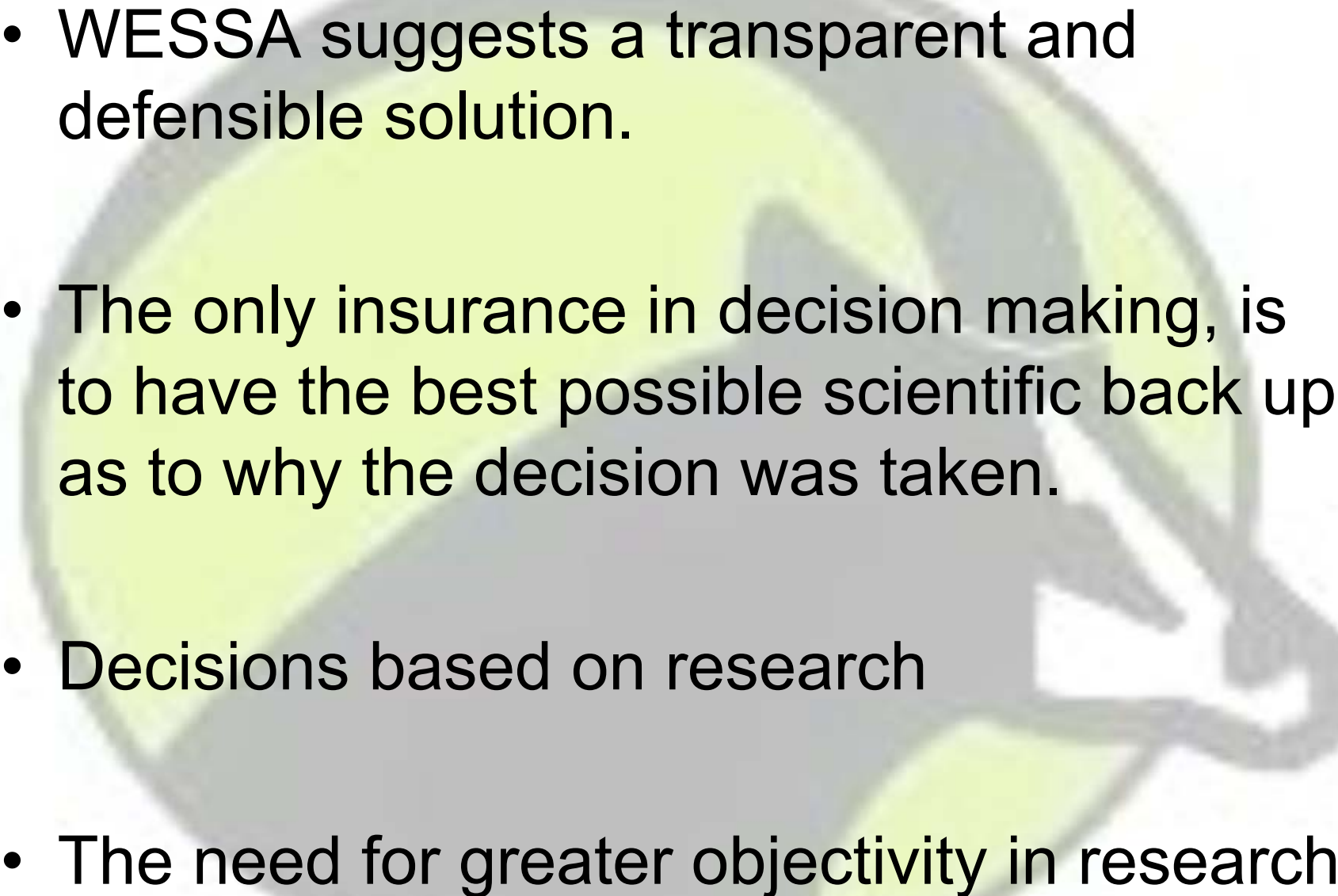
- A decision, whether or not to reduce the elephant population in Kruger, is unavoidable.
- We (concerned and informed citizens) are stuck in a cul-de-sac with over 10 000 elephants - and we have to find a way out.

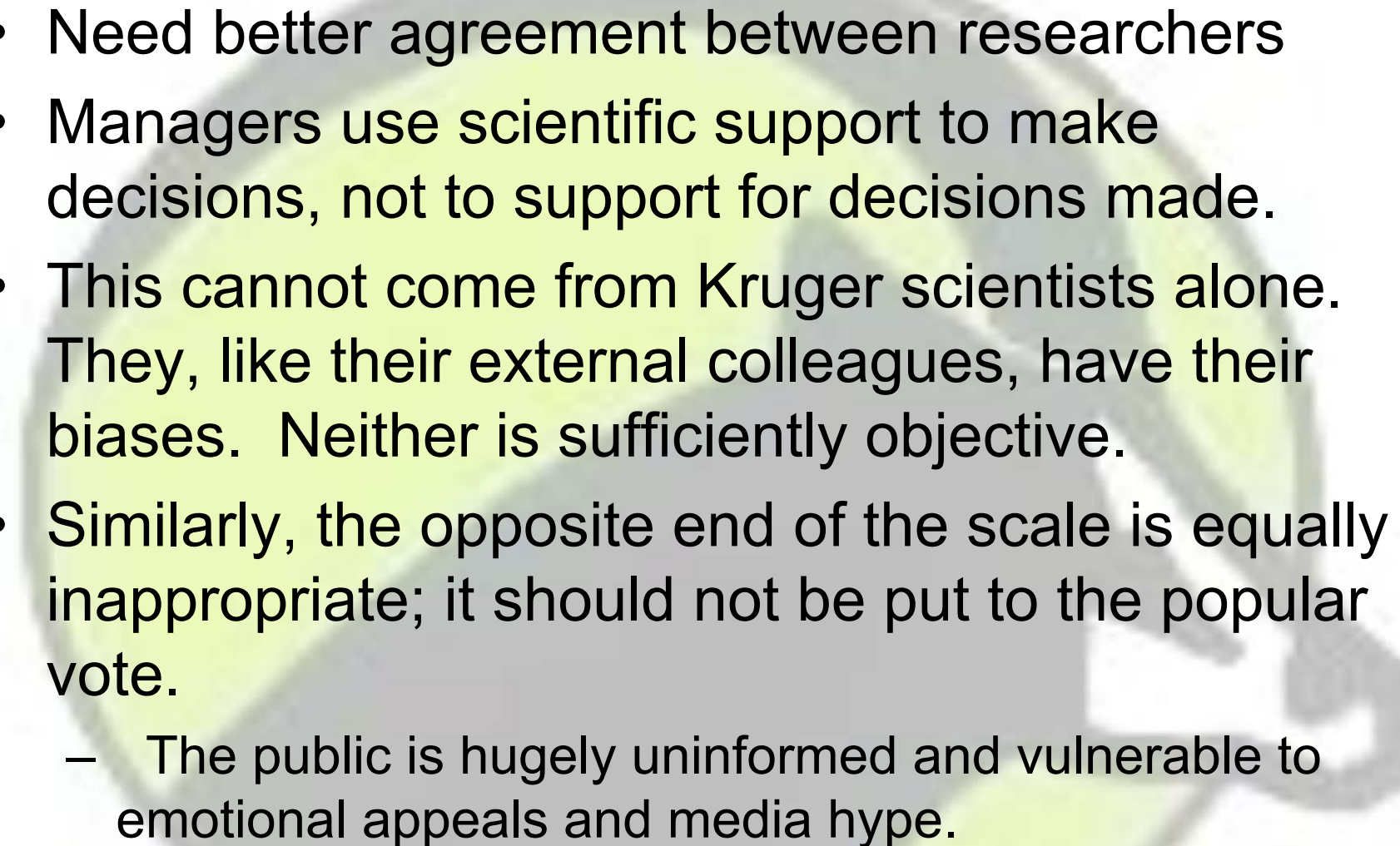
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- Informed citizens kept mining out of Kruger and out of St Lucia, and eventually helped to keep a million speculators off Table Mountain.
 - Surely we can solve this problem with our imagination and our proven willpower?
 - Different as far as public sentiment is concerned as the temptation to mobilise the public around an emotive issue will backfire.

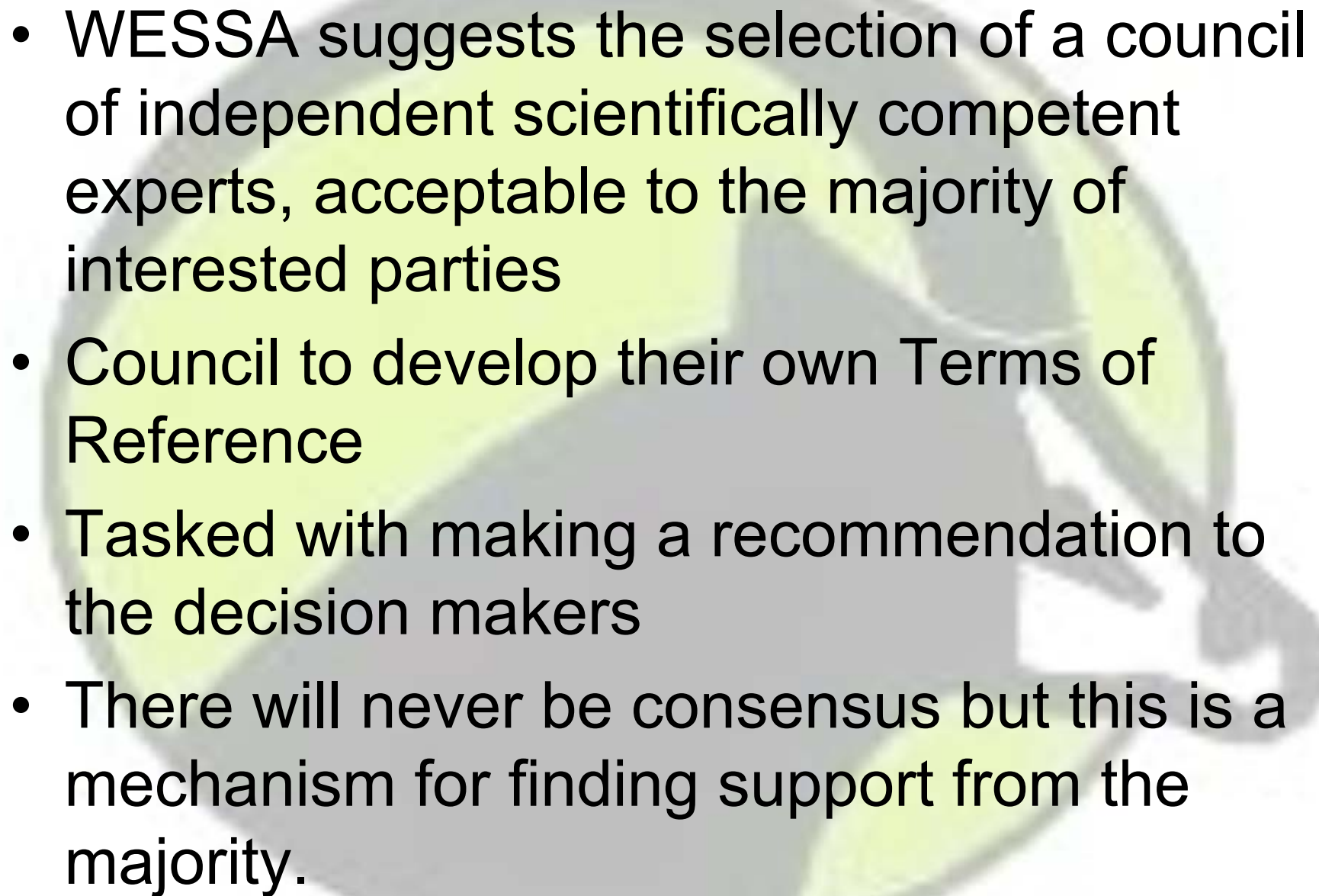
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- Science must be used as the main basis for making decisions
 - ‘precautionary principle’
 - course of action taken should always be that of least regret
 - the decision that holds least risk of irreversible failure
 - the one that forecloses least on future options
 - Still need to debate the application of the precautionary principle to Kruger’s elephant problem


- Park management science is no longer the mystic preserve of khaki-clad field ecologists
- Work needs to be managed and evaluated by more objective and independent structures to counteract the limitations and bias imposed by institutional settings
- **NEED** to resolve the disagreements between scientists and to communicate the relevant results clearly to management and to the public

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- Millions have been spent on research and monitoring.
 - If we cannot get clear guidelines from this investment something radical must be done.
 - If it is no problem to raise a few million dollars to translocate a couple of hundred elephants, we should be able to find the money to be able to understand the system involved

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- WESSA suggests a transparent and defensible solution.
 - The only insurance in decision making, is to have the best possible scientific back up as to why the decision was taken.
 - Decisions based on research
 - The need for greater objectivity in research

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- Need better agreement between researchers
 - Managers use scientific support to make decisions, not to support for decisions made.
 - This cannot come from Kruger scientists alone. They, like their external colleagues, have their biases. Neither is sufficiently objective.
 - Similarly, the opposite end of the scale is equally inappropriate; it should not be put to the popular vote.
 - The public is hugely uninformed and vulnerable to emotional appeals and media hype.

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- WESSA suggests the selection of a council of independent scientifically competent experts, acceptable to the majority of interested parties
 - Council to develop their own Terms of Reference
 - Tasked with making a recommendation to the decision makers
 - There will never be consensus but this is a mechanism for finding support from the majority.

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- South Africa is a world-leader in conservation management.
 - We have learned and experienced a great deal from noteworthy successes and failures.
 - We have a world-class solid foundation to build on, without fear or favour.
 - The road ahead must show we are not losing our way and with it our reputation.

H P ESTERHUYSE
KRAAIRIVIER

DANGER AHEAD
FASTEN SAFETY BELTS
AND REMOVE DENTURES

GEVAAR VOOR
MAAK GORDELS VAS
EN VERWYDER KUNSTANDE