



REPUBLIC OF NAMIBIA

MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM

**STATEMENT BY THE MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND
TOURISM ON THE HUNTING OF AN ELEPHANT DECLARED
AS PROBLEM CAUSING ANIMAL IN THE OMATJETE AREA,
ERONGO REGION**

**02 JULY 2019
WINDHOEK**

We have learnt with concern about the inaccurate, rubbish and false reports and the assumptions made through social media about the elephant that was destroyed through trophy hunting after being declared a problem causing animal in the Omatjete area, Dauras Constituency in the Erongo Region, which some people refer to as "Voortrekker".

Through social media, some individuals, self-proclaimed conservationists are criticizing the hunt of an elephant which was declared a problem causing animal in accordance with the Revised National Policy on Human Wildlife Conflict Management, 2018 and the Nature Conservation Ordinance, 1975 (Ordinance 4 of 1975). This elephant, so called "Voortrekker" was declared a problem causing animal after a lengthy investigation and careful monitoring. There has been persistent problems caused by this elephant, to the extent that the conflict become an intolerable burden on resident communities and a threat human lives.

Communities of Omatjete have for a long time complained about elephants causing damages to property and threatening lives of people in their area. Damages have been seen in the area, and one person has also been killed by an elephant in recent years in that area. With this situation, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism had to launch a N\$4,000,000 project to upgrade water infrastructure for the communities and provide alternative water points for elephants in the area. However, we still and observe human elephant conflict in the area, and other areas in the country. More work in terms of putting mitigation and preventative measures still need to be done.

We are aware that communities of Sorri Sorris, Otjimboyo and Tsiseb Conservancies have asked for the declared problem causing animal not to be destroyed, which we understand that request was made to the Ministry at the influence of some NGOs and individuals in the area, as the letter by the three conservancies to the Ministry is not even signed by the legitimate persons from the conservancies. It must be noted that the human elephant conflict was reported in the Omatjete area and not Sorri Sorris, Otjimboyo and Tsiseb areas. The elephant was therefore declared as problem causing animal to be destroyed in the Omatjete area as the affected area.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism would like to further bring to the attention of the public and the international community that elephants occur across the entire north of Namibia with two main sub-populations in the northeastern and the northwestern parts of the country. In 1995, Namibia had about 7,000 elephants, in 2004 the total population was estimated at about 16,000 animals, while the current figure is just over 22,000 elephants, the highest recorded number since population surveys commenced and showing a continuous positive growth trajectory.

The northwestern population is estimated, based on aerial surveys, at 4,627 animals (2,911 in Etosha National Park estimated in 2015 and 1,716 elephants in the northwest (Erongo, Kunene and Omusati Regions) estimated in 2016. Elephants occur as far south as the Ugab River and occasionally in the Omaruru River and in most of the river catchments that flow westwards to the Atlantic Ocean in the north, and have been expanding their range in the past two decades. The northeastern population numbers over 19,549 (13,136 in Zambezi Region including the Mahango Core Area of the Bwabwata National Park in Kavango East Region, and 6,413 in Khaudum National Park and neighbouring conservancies, all estimated based on aerial surveys in 2015). Movements between different populations sporadically occur, providing opportunities for genetic interchange. Numbers will continue to be monitored through aerial surveys at two to three year intervals, with an aerial survey of elephants being planned for this year.

Elephants are able to survive in a very wide range of habitats across the extremes of rainfall in Africa. The elephants in Erongo and Kunene Regions are being referred to by some persons as “desert elephants” because of their ability to live in arid conditions where annual rainfall is less than 150mm. From what we know today, this ability is not due to any genetic adaptation but through their knowledge of the terrain, high mobility and physical endurance. They are nevertheless the same species of elephants that occurs elsewhere in the country and is scientifically known as '*Loxodonta africana*'.

Strictly speaking there is no such an entity as “desert elephants”. All our elephants are African elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) and not desert elephants. It is unfortunate that some people interested in marketing elephants as tourism attractions or those against hunting or those who do not care about the damages elephants are causing to rural communities continue to refer to them as desert elephants with the apparent intention of implying endangerment or eminent extinction of these elephants. These elephants are not at risk of extinction at all, in fact, their numbers have increased to the highest level in at least half a century over which aerial surveys were done or credible estimates were made.

Although about 17% of the land surface of Namibia has been placed in proclaimed protected areas (National Parks and Game Parks), the protected areas only cover 50% of the national elephant range. An increasing proportion of the elephant range is in communal areas, as the elephant population continues to increase and extend its range. Since most of the elephants in the northwest (except the population in Etosha National Park) occur on communal lands, it is essential to ensure that resident communities will tolerate elephants in the long term. Co-existence with elephants implies that a balance is needed between the costs that they incur and the benefits that can be derived from them. In 1996 the Government of the Republic of Namibia through the Nature Conservation Amendment Act of 1996 (Act 5 of 1996) provided for the formation of Communal Area Conservancies that gave consumptive and non-consumptive utilization rights of wildlife to rural communities. This was an essential step to ensure that rural communities can offset the costs of living with elephants and other wildlife through benefits that can be derived from them.

In line with the Nature Conservation Amendment Act of 1996 (Act 5 of 1996), the Elephant Management Plan, National Policy on Community Based Natural Resource Management, and the Revised National Policy on Human Wildlife Conflict Management, this elephant has been declared a problem causing animal by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism after a long period of monitoring and putting preventative measures to avoid damages to human property by elephants. Officials of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism could

have hunted the elephant but having the elephant to be trophy hunted was the preferred option, as at least some revenue can be generated in the process for the relevant communities, to be used in mitigating further human elephant conflict that may be caused.

It is therefore unnecessary to attack and create unnecessary threats on the Professional Hunter and Trophy Hunter of this elephant. They have conducted this hunt within the laws of the Republic of Namibia to the satisfaction of the Ministry of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

Human wildlife conflict is escalating (due to increased population size and range expansion, drought situation in the country as well as changes in land use), and in 2018, the number of problem causing animal incidents reported to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism was over five thousand (6,143). In some unfortunate incidents, human lives were lost due to elephant attacks. Addressing human-wildlife conflict requires striking a balance between conservation priorities and the needs of people living with wildlife.

It is the opinion of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism that the aggressiveness of the elephants and their new migration patterns inland is an indication of disturbance in the Ugab River, probably caused more by irresponsible eco-tourism and vehicles than anything else. Some NGOs and individuals even name these elephants for tourism attraction or other reasons, a practice that the Ministry strongly opposes. There should be no elephant referred to as "Voortrekker". This is unacceptable and should not be repeated by those involved. Elephants are wild animals, not pets, not domesticated animals, and they do not have human characters. Reports have also been received of the use of camera of unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) being flown too close to elephant herds and accordingly disturbing such herds. This disturbance is causing elephants to be aggressive as well, and cause conflicts with communities who leave with such elephants. Willful disturbance of a specially protected species, elephant in this case, is a punishable offence and the Ministry is on the lookout for such activities for immediate action and enforcement of the law.

There are suggestions within our critics that we should overlook our own people's plights at the expense of tourists to the country. This is despite the fact that our citizens have accepted to share their living space with wild animals which most of the time destroy their properties and other sources of their livelihoods. In some instances human lives are lost.

It is a pity to see that some people still think Africans cannot run their own affairs and therefore should be subjected to their ideologies that have no regard for our people. For as much as we value tourism as an economic sector based on the revenue it generates, as responsible government we will always put the needs of our people first without compromise or fail.

Unfortunately, we also have a few individuals in Namibia who are simply unable to get their heads around the big picture of conservation on communal and commercial land, and the vital role that incentives, elephant management and social acceptance play in the process. They cannot look into the future to see where Namibia needs to be in decades to come. They rather look at each elephant individually. This is not conservation biology approach, but a more western urban short term animal rights approach which is higher counter-productive to the long term conservation.

Namibia is committed to the sustainable use of wildlife resources, as is indeed provided for in our National Constitution. Sustainable use of wildlife resources is the result of good conservation and good wildlife management, and it is in our collective interest to ensure that we use this resource sustainably. By now it has become common knowledge that tourism in general and trophy hunting in particular has grown to be one of the most important industries in Namibia in terms of its strong contribution to the Gross Domestic Product, employment creation and the well-being and social upliftment of our rural people, not to mention being the main economic driver for the protection of wildlife habitat.

The Ministry of Environment and Tourism is nevertheless aware of specific Non-Governmental Organizations and individuals who are working against the wildlife conservation activities of the Government and sustainable utilization of wildlife resources

by rural communities through the conservancy programme. This has negative implications for our Community Based Natural Resource Management programme, which has now been widely recognized as an innovative and successful people-oriented approach to conservation. We have become recognized as a leader in this field. We have restored the link between conservation and rural development by enabling communal areas farmers to derive a direct income from the sustainable use of wildlife and tourism activities.

These specific NGOs and individuals have no research permits for conducting research on elephants in the Erongo and Kunene Regions or elsewhere in the country and they at best only have short term local and anecdotal information to support their claims. Neither do they have operating agreements or Memoranda of Understanding with the Government of the Republic of Namibia through the Ministry of Environment and Tourism on their activities. Their activities and pronouncements on elephant conservation are seemingly not intended to foster cooperation with the Ministry and other wildlife conservation stakeholders and we urge them to refrain from this irresponsible behavior. The Ministry cannot let them to create confusion amongst rural communities or the public and to tarnish Namibia's conservation achievements.

There are also allegations of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism being in deep debt to WWF which has hi-jacked conservation in Namibia. This is totally unfounded and incorrect. This is actually nonsense, like the rest of it. The Ministry of Environment and Tourism through the Directorate of Wildlife and National Parks is the wildlife management authority in the Republic of Namibia. Our management decisions are based on the available data and information, management plans, guideline documents, policies and legislation on wildlife in our country, for which we are very proud with the current wildlife status in the country.

In summary, there are more elephants in Namibia today than at any time in the past 100 years. One of the reasons for their increase in numbers is that they have a value, communities have rights to manage and use the wildlife, and are starting to earn

significant income from wildlife and this is creating the incentives for them to look after and protect wildlife and wildlife habitat, including elephants, all of which leads to a positive conservation result. Controlled hunting and sustainable use of wildlife are a result of good conservation. Namibia's elephant population and the Erongo and Kunene population in particular, is a healthy and growing population. It is growing at about 3.3% per year. The current levels of consumptive off-take are extremely conservative. They are well below sustainable off-take levels, and the population continues to grow and expand.

We therefore call upon critics on elephant population management and human wildlife conflict management to stop and let us implement policies and programmes on our wildlife conservation, community livelihood and sustainable use thereof, for improved economic growth, species management and poverty eradication. We further call upon them to provide support to sound elephant management practices, in particular, to programmes such as human wildlife conflict management, community based natural resource management, strengthening law enforcement and elephant protection, among other priorities.

The Namibian public and the international community are thus called upon to ignore these inaccurate, rubbish and false reports and assumptions on our elephants and sustainable utilization practices.


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Executive Director

