

EPILOGUE

The overall policy review process followed over the past 12 years has increased awareness of the context and issues of the elephant management debate amongst all stakeholders. There is also a better understanding of the different points of view and what they represent.

The long-term research programme to support elephant management in South Africa will address important unanswered questions about elephants in ecosystems and their population dynamics. The “Assessment of South African Elephant Management” has used a synthesis of available knowledge, concerns and ideas to generate a list of priority themes for future research, which will be supported by the Minister.

The Norms and Standards announced in February 2008, together with the Assessment, clearly state that SANParks should manage elephants to induce spatial and temporal variation in the intensity with which elephants use landscapes. Thus management will focus on spatial distribution of animals and their impacts, rather than on animal numbers *per se*. The adaptive management principles to which SANParks adheres, and the organisation’s core values, will be brought to bear on developing and monitoring for Thresholds of Potential Concern. These are in turn designed to reflect mechanisms for, and the spatial distribution of, the impacts of animals, including elephant, on national park landscapes and the biodiversity they support.

When thresholds are exceeded or are predicted to be exceeded, management options will focus on spatially and temporally altering the distribution of key resources (*e.g.* water), the scale of resource availability (*e.g.* removing fences), and the access to resources, particularly those impacted by elephants (*e.g.* enclosure fences to keep elephants out of sensitive areas). Further options may include consideration of non-lethal induction of spatial and temporal variation in elephant numbers to modulate the intensity with which elephants use a landscape (*e.g.* contraception in small parks), and lethal induction of spatial and temporal variation in elephant impacts through reducing numbers (*e.g.* culling) when other methods are considered to be inappropriate or ineffective to achieve the park’s objectives.

SANParks envisage that a combination of management approaches and options will achieve the integrated ecosystem objectives supporting each national park’s desired state by focusing on restoring, or mimicking, spatial and temporal variation in how elephants, as one component of the suite of megaherbivores, use and modify landscapes. Approval, through the national Norms and Standards, for the full toolbox of management interventions means that SANParks will be able to draw on the most appropriate management interventions for prevailing circumstances. However, the choice of management tool to be used will not be indiscriminate. Even a decision to cull is one that will be made prudently in the face of managing towards a jointly agreed-upon desired state for a park through managing risks. This is guided by the provisions of the Park Management Plans which have in themselves incorporated extensive public input in their development.

Very importantly, SANParks will continue using Strategic Adaptive Management as a learning approach that generates shared understanding and informed, legitimate decision-making for policy-makers, managers and stakeholders who engage this complex, dynamic and changing social-ecological challenge.