

# **CONSOLIDATED DRAFT TRANSLOCATION POLICY FOR MAMMALS IN THE WESTERN CAPE PROVINCE**

## **Executive summary**

The unique and rich biodiversity of South Africa, and especially that of the Western Cape Province, faces numerous threats to its survival. Despite these threats the biodiversity of the Western Cape has been hailed as amongst the most diverse in the world. Furthermore, falling mostly within this province is the Cape Floristic Region, the smallest of the world's six floral kingdoms and one of two internationally recognized 'Biodiversity Hotspots' which jointly form the former Cape Floristic Kingdom, now known as the Greater Cape Floral Region, with the Succulent Karoo Biome representing the other of the two 'hotspots'. The Cape Floristic Region has been recognized as one of the most important 'hotspots' of biodiversity worldwide by the Global Environmental Facility, which is an advisory body to the World Bank, and which considered it to be an area of such enormous biological diversity that it was a priority in which to invest capital in order to ensure its survival for potential future exploitation. Furthermore, large portions of the Cape Floristic Region have been jointly proclaimed as a serial World Heritage Site by the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In addition, the economic biodiversity value of the Cape Floristic Region was recently estimated to have an annual value of approximately R10 billion rand, which equates to about 10% of the Gross Geographic Product of the Western Cape Province. The Cape Floristic Region is thus not only a local provincial asset but its biodiversity is in fact considered both a national and international asset.

The other internationally recognized 'biodiversity hotspot' is the Succulent Karoo Biome, the largest portion of which also falls within the Western Cape Province, again with very many species that are unique to that area, as is the case with the Cape Floristic Region.

There are, however, a variety of factors which threaten the continued survival of this unique biodiversity. These include injudicious development, the invasion of indigenous plant and animal habitats by alien species, the irresponsible use of both surface and ground water, and global climatic change.

As the statutory authority responsible for the conservation of Western Cape biodiversity CapeNature therefore has a local, provincial, national and international mandate, and responsibility, to protect and conserve it, and within the national legislative framework is also required to take substantive steps to ensure this protection and conservation. One of the most important steps required to be taken is to regulate the movement of taxa alien to the Western Cape and which threaten Western Cape taxa in one way or another. This document is aimed at limiting the threats that mammals alien to the Western Cape pose by recognizing the most important categories of threat. Broadly speaking, these are either of an ecological, genetic, or pathogenic nature, and this document illustrates the steps that need to be taken to either eliminate these threats or at least to minimise them, and is now to be made available on our website for comment.

## **The rationale behind the proposed consolidation of CapeNature's policy on the translocation of mammals**

The unique biodiversity of the Western Cape Province is one of its greatest assets. The biodiversity economy of the Cape Floristic Region was recently estimated to have an annual value of approximately R10 billion. This is equivalent to 10% of the value of the Gross Geographic Product of the province.

Furthermore, in 2004 large portions of the Cape Floristic Region were proclaimed as World Heritage Sites. The Cape Floristic Region is also in its own right one of the world's so-called biodiversity "hotspots". These "hotspots" are areas on the planet with exceptionally high levels of biodiversity, which are simultaneously under considerable threat of biodiversity loss as a result of anthropogenic developments, which therefore makes them exceptionally vulnerable to negative impacts. The underlying cause of such exceptional species diversity lies in the great physical diversity of the Western Cape landscape creating a vast variety of habitats, each with its own topography, soils and climatic conditions. It is thus self-evident that the Western Cape, which is blessed with this unique biodiversity, requires substantive conservation measures for its continued protection. CapeNature, therefore, does not only have a provincial responsibility for the conservation of this biodiversity, but in fact has a national and international obligation to protect and conserve the Cape Floristic Region.

There are indeed a variety of factors which threaten the conservation of the Cape Floristic Region. These factors include, amongst others, poorly planned physical developments, irresponsible utilization of water resources, and injudicious artificial movement of alien plant and animal species. Global climatic change is a further threat to this unique biodiversity.

The management, and eradication where possible, of alien species is another of our national priorities. This is emphasized as a priority by the international Convention on Biological Diversity, to which South Africa is a signatory.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa requires that reasonable legislative and other measures must be put in place to ensure the protection of the environment for present and future generations. CapeNature is responsible for the implementation of the regulations of the relevant Constitutional articles in the Western Cape Province in order to ensure the conservation of this unique biodiversity which falls within its jurisdiction and to promote and to ensure its continued existence.

Currently only approximately 5.4% of South Africa's land surface area is formally protected in various statutorily protected areas (nature reserves and national parks). Private landowners therefore have an important role to play in order to ensure that ecosystems outside formally protected areas are also conserved in a functional state.

Since 1998 South Africa has been developing a legal framework designed to conserve and manage the environment and biodiversity at a national level. This legal framework resorts under the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA). The Biodiversity Act (NEMBA) forms part of this framework. In terms of the Constitution and NEMBA, the regulations of the international Convention on Biological Diversity are binding on the Republic and all organs of State within the Republic. This means that these regulations must be complied with in terms of all aspects of government policy, planning and development. As a result of this requirement it follows that the diversity of gene pools, species, ecosystems, amongst others, must be taken into account in all

decision-making processes associated with the environment. A section of NEMBA also makes provision for the promulgation of national regulations aimed at the management of alien species.

In the Western Cape Province biodiversity management is governed by the Nature Conservation Ordinance. This ordinance also determines in general the measures that must be taken by CapeNature which are required, or desired, to attain these aims and objectives of the Ordinance, and to protect the unique biodiversity within the Western Cape from, amongst others, the threats posed by alien species. CapeNature therefore has a legal responsibility to establish the necessary policy and management measures in order to administer the Ordinance and to comply with the regulation of the Constitution and the national legal framework. The potential impacts of injudicious translocations of various biodiversity elements, including mammals, were recognized by CapeNature even prior to 1990, and as a result a policy was prepared to regulate the movement of mammals within and through the former Cape Province. The initial translocation policy was signed on the 23<sup>rd</sup> January 1990. This policy covered the entire mammalian spectrum and was not intended to be solely for the herbivores of the game industry. The policy had already at that stage identified ecotypic ranges for certain species, including bushbuck, grey duiker, klipspringer, *etc.* Ecotypes are genetically distinct populations within various geographic ranges. Genetic research undertaken since those times has increasingly supported the existence of these ecotypes. This has meant that measures needed to be put into place to conserve the genetic variability of different geographic populations within a given species.

The conservation of genetic variability and the protection of ecotypes within their designated distribution ranges must therefore be primary objectives of any nature conservation policy, based on ecological, pathological, genetic, taxonomic, and aesthetic arguments. These objectives can only be realised through the protection of the genetic integrity of populations without the risk of undesirable genetic contamination. The injudicious mixing of species, subspecies, and ecotypes of wild animals is biologically unacceptable and ecologically harmful. The original 1990 provincial translocation policy, as outlined elsewhere, had already established that different ecotypes of the same species should not be translocated into one another's natural ranges. The principle of genetic conservation and the recognition of ecotypic variation were thus both entrenched in the original 1990 provincial policy as fundamental factors.

Over and above the genetic issues, ecotypes are also associated with locally-occurring parasites and diseases, to which, in most cases, they have developed natural immunity. The translocation of one ecotype of a given species into the range of another ecotype could potentially result in the transmission of diseases against which the resident animals have no natural immunity. This in turn could potentially result in the local extinction of the local ecotype.

The natural distribution of several of the herbivores that previously occurred in the Western Cape Province has also already been reduced to certain small areas within the original range. These naturally occurring survivors should never be put at risk by injudicious translocation of aliens into their natural distribution ranges. The argument that a given habitat is suitable for the introduction of an alien species is seldom valid since aggressive alien species are frequently the cause of ecological problems. In those situations where suitable habitat for local indigenous species is already limited, the impact of these aliens becomes even more threatening.

The original provincial translocation policy laid down several principles that need to be taken into account when evaluating applications for the translocation of wild animals. These include the following.

- Only applications for species which occurred in an area historically should be considered for translocation.
- Only wild animals originating from genetically appropriate populations should be considered for translocation.
- The receiving environment and its naturally-occurring fauna and flora may not be negatively impacted upon.
- No translocation may threaten the genetic integrity of other species.
- Naturally-occurring species may not be displaced by the translocated species.

As with most policies, the original 1990 provincial translocation policy was a dynamic document which was regularly revised as new information became available. In the roughly nineteen years since the approval of the original 1990 policy, considerable advances have been made with regard to biodiversity issues, especially in terms of the molecular approach to genetics and systematics. A further complexity has also arisen as a result of the changes in provincial boundaries. Since the original policy was prepared for the former/erstwhile Cape Province, it was deemed necessary to adapt it to address more specifically the biodiversity conservation needs of the Cape Floristic Region and related areas. Furthermore, since many species which originally occurred within the former Cape Province never actually occurred in the Western Cape Province, and represented potential threats to the Western Cape biodiversity, this provided still further motivation to adapt the policy.

The “precautionary principle” is internationally recognized as an integral part of decision-making processes with respect to biodiversity and effectively dictates that when there is any suspicion that an alien wild taxon/species may have a negative impact on the natural biodiversity of a given area, the application for that taxon/species must be dealt with responsibly and circumspectly. This implies that CapeNature, as a responsible conservation authority, must implement measures to prevent such negative impacts in Western Cape or at least to minimize their effects.

Historically, property fencing was also a deciding factor in terms of the translocation of animals which had not occurred in historic times. In recent years the efficacy of such containment has been brought into question through the impact of natural ‘disasters’ such as fires and floods, and fencing has been shown to be an unreliable safeguard against accidental escape of such undesirable species.

In October 2005 a ministerially appointed panel of experts provided the erstwhile Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism with a report in which they aired their considerable concern about the importation of alien species and the translocation of indigenous species outside their natural distribution ranges, as well as the genetic manipulation of certain taxa/species. That report therefore proposed that a general ban should be placed on both the import of alien species for hunting or agricultural purposes and on the translocation of indigenous species/taxa outside their historic ranges.

The responsible translocation of mammals, including the larger herbivores, is undoubtedly an important management tool. Although game species are translocated over wide areas internationally, for both hunting and ecotourism purposes, irresponsible translocation of these animals beyond their historic natural distribution ranges has created conservation problems with serious consequences for conservation authorities and conservation managers worldwide. Unfortunately, until fairly recently there has been relatively little attention paid to the ecological and economic cost implications of such undesirable translocations. As a result there have recently been several warnings from within conservation circles alerting a variety of parties to the

dangers of injudicious translocations when genetic, taxonomic, pathogenic and ecological consequences are not taken into account.

In the light of these facts, CapeNature has seen fit to consolidate the original translocation policy, its amendments and guidelines into this so-called Consolidated Draft Translocation Policy for mammals. This document is now published for your information and you are hereby formally invited to provide written comment to the following address:

Mr. J van Deventer  
CapeNature  
The Program Manager: Wildlife Management  
P.O. Box 26  
Porterville  
6810

or

[jvdeventer@capenature.co.za](mailto:jvdeventer@capenature.co.za)