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# Tourism Development in Protected Areas: WESSA Position Statement

This position statement is based on the principles of ecologically sustainable development, and reflects the Vision; Mission; Aim; Style and Values of WESSA.

**This position statement recognises that the socio-economic and environmental landscapes are complex and so must make space for continuous change and emergence.**

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**This position statement replaces all other WESSA Tourism development in protected areas policies which were written before December 2012.**

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## INTRODUCTION

South Africa has some of the oldest protected areas<sup>1</sup> in Africa and is blessed with some of the richest in the world. As a result, due consideration must be given to potential impacts on protected areas and the public should be engaged in any development planning. Protected areas are areas of land (or sea) that are protected by law (Protected Areas Act (Act 57 of 2003) and biodiversity Act (Act 10 of 2004)) and managed mainly for biodiversity conservation. Protected areas are critical for our wellbeing for a number of reasons, such as:

- They provide critical ecosystem services;
- They provide an important biodiversity and natural heritage conservation function for future generations;
- They are important in ecological sustainability and resilience;
- They provide areas for adaption to climate change;
- They form an important opportunity for people to connect with South Africa's rich biodiversity and natural heritage;
- They are a key asset in environmental education;
- Provide wilderness<sup>2</sup> experience opportunities;
- Protected areas can support rural livelihoods and local economic development.

## POSITION STATEMENT

With regards to tourism development inside Protected Areas:

1. WESSA is committed to a fair and informed process founded in: the principles of sustainability, earth stewardship and public participation; balanced information; open communication and dialogue; and fair and equitable participation.
2. WESSA expects developments associated with protected areas to be located outside (on the periphery) of the formally protected area network.
3. WESSA has sympathy for the financial challenges to conservation.
4. WESSA recognizes that tourism is one of the key financial drivers of conservation and that some conservation funding must be generated from tourism.

5. WESSA understands that some protected areas are compelled to expand the recreational opportunities to diversify their market and attract a broader sector of society, but this must not be at the expense of biodiversity conservation.
6. WESSA supports appropriate tourism development that is peripheral or external to protected areas.
7. WESSA supports developments sensitive to the socio-economic needs of local communities.
8. WESSA expects any development essential in a protected to take maximum steps to ensure least impact on the values and biodiversity of the protected area. Protected area tourism facilities should be leading examples of co-existence with nature and sustainability.
9. WESSA expects the sound implementation of the constitution, National Environmental Management Act and associated regulations in any development within a protected area. In this regard, strategic environmental assessments should guide tourism developments associated with protected areas.

WESSA recognises that the national protected area network is currently below the target levels<sup>3,4</sup>, and whilst efforts to increase the protected areas exist, the options are becoming limited and more fragmented as planned and informal rural development pressures increase. WESSA believes that all future tourist developments associated with and especially within our protected area network should be very carefully considered within this context.

## CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION

WESSA believes the following:

### ***Strategy for tourism developments in protected areas***

WESSA's first point of entry is therefore at the strategic level: The relevant agency's over-arching policy and strategy for tourism developments in protected areas needs to be made explicit before development is considered. All development plans should go through a transparent and consultative public participation process and should be in line with the Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment and the Protected Area's management plans.

### ***Government financial commitment to biodiversity conservation***

WESSA believes that government should make appropriate investments in biodiversity conservation to put substance to its commitments as a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity and its statement of intent to achieve IUCN targets

for protected areas<sup>3</sup>. It is unrealistic to expect tourism revenues alone to fund this mandate. This matter will increasingly gain importance as government makes progress towards its target of increasing the conservation estate by 2.2% [by 2014]<sup>4</sup>

WESSA is also concerned that revenue generation is seen as a Key Performance Area of conservation professionals, thereby distracting them from their core business of biodiversity conservation management.

### ***Community conservation***

Wherever practical and possible, development should be sited on the periphery, or external to the formally protected area. Existing camps should not be expanded unless it can be proved that the proposed expansion is in the best interests of the area concerned as well as the adjoining communities.

Management and development adjacent to and within protected areas must be both socially and environmentally sensitive, particularly regarding the needs of local communities. WESSA supports responsible tourist development; however, we are concerned as to where and how this development takes place. By siting new developments on the periphery or outside our Protected Areas, greater work opportunities will be created for local people living adjacent to these areas. In this way local people will see for themselves the benefits of conservation and will more readily want to conserve natural areas and their biota.

## **REFERENCES**

1. Protected areas as defined and mapped on the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) BGIS system. <http://bgis.sanbi.org/protectedareas/protectedAreas.asp>
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3. National Protected area Expansion Strategy 2008 (published 2010) from Convention on Biological Biodiversity website: <http://www.cbd.int/countries/?country=za>
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[http://www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/docs/npaes\\_resource\\_document.pdf](http://www.environment.gov.za/sites/default/files/docs/npaes_resource_document.pdf)