

**An Environmental Assessment of Tourism Access
through the Northern Boundary of the
Etosha National Park**

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Executive Summary

Tourism infrastructure in the Etosha National Park (ENP) has been developed from a purely southern perspective. This is reflected in the fact that the access gates to the park are all linked to access routes to the south. This has three main impacts on tourism development and regional development to the north of Etosha, as follows:

- There is no ready access for people living in the north to enter the ENP, other than to travel around the park, an extra round-trip distance of about 190 km, constituting both an economic disincentive of about N\$400, and a psychological disincentive of leaving traditional areas and having to pass through freehold farmlands;
- There is no access for tourists visiting the ENP to travel to the northern regions other than to go around the park, as described above. This situation is in large part responsible for the low level of tourism development in the north. A recent tourism questionnaire indicated that some 50,000-70,000 visitors would be interested in visiting the area if there was ready access; and
- There is little tourism infrastructure and few tourism services to the north, reflecting the low investment opportunity that currently exists. The 1999 Tourism Accommodation and Info Guide lists some 48 facilities to the immediate south of Etosha, but only two to the north.

A recent workshop (26-27 January 1999) identified the opening of access routes through the northern boundary of ENP as a priority action for tourism development in the "Four O" regions - referred to in this report for convenience as the *Omilunga region*. All consultations for this report (see appendix 2), ranging from central to regional political office-bearers, technical personnel in GRN to tourism operators, give their unanimous support and high priority rating to the opening of such access.

A number of options were investigated. These are

- The gate at Andoni, north of Namutoni, and linked to the Ondangwa-Tsumeb tar road by a gravel all-weather road that crosses the Andoni plains via the Okashana agricultural center;
- The gate at Narawandu, north west of Okuakuejo, with access northwards on a small sandy track, via the Otjivalunda salt pans and Uuvudhiya and then across the main oshanas of the Cuvelei system to the Oshakati-Okahao tar road some 40 km west of Oshakati; and
- The Ekuma river/oshana entry point to Etosha, due north of Okaukuejo, with access northwards via a track in the Oshana and across the grassy plains to the Lake Oponono area and on to the tar road near Ondangwa.

An ecological evaluation of the area immediately north of Etosha revealed that, at the local level, it is generally robust and will not be negatively impacted by the proposed tourism development. The system consists of an ephemeral wetland – the Cuvelai Oshana system - dominated by shallow drainage lines and floodplain grasslands on a flat, sandy Kalahari basin, which is dominated by mopane (*Colophospermum mopane*) scrub and, in places where the sand is deep, by mopane and *Terminalia sericea* trees. There are a few small mud pans surrounded by mopane trees and *Acacia* species, but the dominant feature to the south is medium to large salt pans in calcrete depressions. *Terminalia prunioides* trees and *Catophractes alexandrii* shrubs usually surround these. There is presently little wildlife in the areas, although elephants move through seasonally. The vegetation, though uniform and somewhat monotonous, is in good condition. Possible impacts from tourism through the area could include (a) the creation of new tracks and off-road driving – particularly around and across salt pans, (b) starting of veld fires in the dry season, and (c) disturbance to breeding birds of prey in *Terminalia* trees around pans. These are considered to be low-risk impacts that can be relatively easily managed.

Within the park along its northern boundary, the vegetation is essentially the same, though dominated by the Etosha Pan just south of where the Ekuma River enters the park. The park supports a large number and diversity of wildlife, including rare and endangered species. However, the opening of controlled and regulated tourism to parts of this area is not expected to have any adverse effects.

Areas to the north of Narawandu gate were used by the South African Defense Force, prior to Namibia's Independence, as practice ranges. These areas have not yet been cleared of unexploded ordnance.

Based on the above assessment and broad general consensus between the stakeholders consulted, the following recommendations are made:

- The Andoni gate be opened to tourism in the shortest practical period of time and operate on the same basis as the Andersson and von Lindequist gates
 - A gate structure be developed at Andoni gate reflecting architectural elements of both the Namutoni Fort and the culture of the north
 - The structure include an office, storeroom, toilet, water tank and communications equipment
 - The gate guard be housed at Okashana (at least for the early phase of development) where there is infrastructure and community support, thereby avoiding the problems of water supply, sewage and waste management at Andoni gate
 - The MET gate guard should enforce basic veterinary control, as per recommendations by Veterinary Services, who are prepared to assist with training. If necessary, the Police will provide backup from a station to be developed at Omuthiya
 - An appropriate name for the gate, with strong local, historic links, has been suggested to be the King Nehale Gate.
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- The Narawandu gate should not be opened at the present time to the general public, because of the road condition to the north and the presence of unexploded military ordnance
 - Access through this area should, however, be given out as two or three concessions, to business ventures based in the north
 - The exclusivity of these concessions to parts of the park and to the north should be a strong marketing tool
 - The concessionaires should be provided with or permitted to build, small offices in Okaukuejo from which to market their tours, which should be allowed to operate in a flexible manner through the Narawandu gate
 - Concessionaires should be encouraged to develop overnight facilities north of the park, as well as to use existing and emerging facilities
 - Concessionaires should be permitted to use a gate (to be constructed as a simple, padlocked management gate) on the Ekuma River as part of the development of circular routes
 - Concessionaires should be encouraged to use skilled guides to make optimum use of the cultural-historic and ecological resources of the area. This is necessary because the topography and vegetation can be monotonous and good interpretive skills will be needed
 - The Ministry of Works, Transport and Communications should be requested to place priority on upgrading the road from the north to the Narawandu gate, and the Ministry of Defense should be requested to clear the area north of Narawandu of unexploded military ordnance. Once these have been done, then the Narawandu gate should be opened to the public on the same basis as the other Etosha gates.

A recommended set of next steps are provided.

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1. BACKGROUND – setting the scene

This report contains the results of a short, intensive evaluation of the most plausible options, likely impacts and recommended mitigation measures, of opening access through the northern boundary of the Etosha National Park (ENP) for tourism. The terms of reference for the report are contained in Appendix 1.

There are compelling socio-economic reasons for opening one or more access routes through the northern boundary of the ENP. At the same time, there are a number of constraints that need to be addressed. The overriding view expressed by all people canvassed, both during this work and at a specific workshop on tourism for the northern regions (26-27 January 1999), is that opening access through the northern boundary of the ENP is a vital step in developing tourism and associated enterprises in northern Namibia.

1.1 North-central Namibia, the Cuvelai-Etosha area

The area under discussion is situated in the north-central part of Namibia, bounded to the north by Angola, to the south by the southern border of Etosha National Park, to the west by the Kunene Region and to the east by the Okavango Region. There are four political regions within the area, the first three of which border on the northern side of Etosha, from west to east as follows: Omusati, Oshana, Oshikoto and Ohangwena. These four regions were formerly called the “Owambo” region (or Owamboland) and, more recently, abbreviated as the Four “O” regions. None of these terms are universally acceptable. A name for the area is badly needed – particularly for purposes of marketing and tourism. The name “Omilunga” has been suggested. It means ‘palm trees’, a common and widespread feature of the Cuvelai drainage system that occurs in all four regions, including the ENP.

The area is extremely flat, with altitudes ranging between 1090 and 1150 m above sea level. Rainfall varies from 300 mm in the extreme southwest to about 550 mm in the northeast. The dominant feature is the large deltoic ephemeral Cuvelai drainage system, which rises in the Angolan highlands between the Okavango and Kunene Rivers and drains across the Omilunga region in a large number of shallow “oshanas” – shallow drainage lines and linked depressions. These converge as they flow southwards, into a series of large pans called Lake Oponono (in above average rainfall years the pans overflow, forming a large lake), and emerge as the Ekuma river, which enters the endoresic Etosha Pan. The Cuvelai system is the ecological key to the richness of the area. It recharges groundwater, renews grazing, brings nutrients and fish, and maintains a high humidity during the crop-growing season.

Ten broad habitats have been identified in the Omilunga region north of Etosha. Four are pertinent for this study. They are:

- Seasonally flooded grasslands, extending from the edge of the Etosha Pan northwards up the Cuvelai system to north of the Lake Oponono area. Soils are saline and the dominant grasses are *Odyssea paucinervis*, *Sporobolus spicata*, *S. salsus*, *Panicum lanipes*, *Monelytrum luederitzianum* and *Eragrostis* species.

- Palm tree savanna, extending from the seasonally flooded grasslands into Angola and containing most of the Cuvelai system. The area is characterised by open grassy drainage channels (oshanas) lined by *Hyphaene ventricosa* palm trees with mopane (*Colophospermum mopane*) dominating between the water courses.
- Bush savanna on generally shallow sandy soils underlain by calcrete, extending to the west of the above habitats, and dominated by mopane; and
- Dry bush savanna on longitudinal sandy dunes to the east of the seasonally flooded grasslands, and dominated by *Acacia*, *Terminalia*, *Boscia*, *Bauhinia*, *Combretum* and *Lonchocarpus* species.

More than 600,000 people – over a third of Namibia’s population – live in the Omilunga region. Most of them farm by growing crops, keeping livestock and using foods from wild plants.

1.2 The Etosha National Park

The ENP is the second largest protected area in Namibia (2.29 million hectares) but by far the best known and most visited park in the country. It is situated in north-central Namibia straddling the 19-degree south latitude, and extends for about 300 km east-west, from 14 to 17 degrees east. To the south and east the park borders onto privately owned farmland, while to the west and north it borders onto communal state land under traditional leadership in the regions of Kunene (west), Omusati (north-west), Oshana (north-central) and Oshikoto (north-east). After completion of work by the 2nd Delimitation Commission, the regional boundaries in the north have been adjusted. The ENP, formerly contained within the Kunene Region, now falls within the Omusati, Oshana and Oshikoto regions.

There are no accurate, widely accepted figures on the number of tourists that enter Namibia each year and the number which enter the ENP. It is generally accepted that in 1997/98 about 500,000 visitors came to Namibia and that over 60% of overseas visitors go to Etosha. Figures from the park itself suggest that about 100,000 visitors entered, with foreign visitors spending on average 3.24 nights in the park per visit and 30% being on their second or more visit to Etosha. Overseas visitors spend on average about 18 days in Namibia. It is also clear that tourism is growing rapidly in Namibia. Figures vary from 10-18% per year for the country as a whole, while for the remote rural regions such as Caprivi and Kunene, the growth is about 20%. This reflects a growing interest towards eco-tourism and cultural tourism.

1.3 History of tourism development in Etosha

The ENP was established in 1907, initially as an area covering 9.3 million hectares, to protect the vast herds of wildlife in the northern and western parts of Namibia. The park also served a political purpose, to act as a buffer between white settler farmers in the south and black communal farmers in the north, with a number of police posts being established just prior to the proclamation of the park.

It was not until many years later in 1955 that Okaukuejo opened as a tourist rest camp followed in 1957 by Namutoni. Prior to that, tourists camped in the open, directly next to

the Okaukuejo water hole. In 1955 some 6,000 visitors were recorded for Etosha, increasing to 33,000 in 1965, 95,000 in 1975, decreasing to 80,000 in 1985 and increasing to 144,000 in 1995 (note, these figures are visitors per tourist camp in Etosha, and persons staying in more than one camp will be double counted).

Entry points for tourism to Etosha are all linked to road access from the south, as follows: (i) Windhoek – Otjiwarongo – Outjo – Okaukuejo, (ii) Windhoek – Otjiwarongo – Tsumeb – Namutoni, and (iii) more recently and only for tour operators under certain conditions, Windhoek – Otjiwarongo – Outjo – Kamanjab – Otjivasando. There are no entrance gates to the north of the ENP.

The increase in tourists visiting Namibia and travelling to Etosha created the basis for diverse and thriving tourism businesses along the access routes, ranging from hotels, guest farms, private wildlife nature reserves, to curio shops, service stations, car and camping hire outlets and tour-guide services. These enterprises, attracting foreign exchange and based on some of Namibia's most important natural resources, are vital both for the national economy and for the peoples' livelihoods.

1.4 Tourism north of Etosha

In the 17th century Owambo pastoralists and farmers moved south from Angola into the Cuvelai drainage system of northern Namibia. Over the next 300 years a "domestication" of the landscape took place, establishing homesteads, clearing areas for cultivation, grazing livestock and hunting wildlife. With increasing populations and colonial restrictions on movement patterns and development options, leading to labour migrancy and warfare, the area suffered environmental degradation, isolation and neglect. Only after Namibia's independence in 1990 have development activities become focussed to peoples' needs in this region. However, because of the past infrastructure patterns, some development options have not been exploited. One of these is tourism. A glance at the 1999 Tourism Accommodation and Info Guide reveals that there are some 48 accommodation facilities between Etosha's southern border and Otjiwarongo, but only two north of Etosha, both in Oshakati and both catering mainly for business people rather than tourists.

By the year 2002 tourism is expected to contribute about N\$2 billion to Namibia's economy. Also, it is one of the best job-creating industries, presently directly employing about 13,000 people but also about an equivalent number in tourism support industries. These jobs are created in rural areas, near peoples' homes. In addition, the community-based tourism initiatives being promoted in Namibia support small-scale ventures and offer opportunities for eco-tourism throughout the country. However, tourism opportunities in the north have not been developed and exploited, despite some 100,000 visitors arriving on the doorstep in Etosha each year. Indeed, tourism in the Omilunga region north of Etosha has not got off the ground. Why is this?

The whole tourism product around Etosha has been planned from a Windhoek-based perspective. The tourism market has traditionally been overseas tourists (mainly German), southern African tourists (mainly South African) and a small sector of affluent Namibian

holiday-makers (mainly white). The entry points are to the south. This has three main impacts. The first is on Namibians living in the north who want to visit the ENP. They have to travel around the park to the south. This is both an economic and inspirational/psychological disincentive. For example, a person travelling on the Oshakati – Tsumeb road would have to travel an additional 186 km to get into and out of Etosha, constituting an additional travel cost of about N\$400. Northern visitors have to leave their region and travel into commercial farmlands to get into the park, despite the long common border they share with the park. This gives the psychological impression that the park is not part of their region.

The second impact is on tourists to Etosha who might want to travel to the Omilunga region to see both the cultures and lifestyles of people as well as the unique ecosystems. It should be borne in mind that most overseas visitors to Namibia never see indigenous Namibian cultures and lifestyles, as their itineraries usually include only the central and west-coast areas, and a trip to Etosha. Cultural tourism is a fast-growing sector of the tourism market. Etosha offers a perfect springboard to the north. However, the present road infrastructure and marketing system is not suited to exploiting this opportunity. Again, tourists have to go around the park to get north. Also, overseas tourists often feel insecure going into areas that do not have a long tourism history, good documentation and well-developed tourism infrastructure. Many would prefer to be guided into these areas by people who know the areas well and who will look after their welfare. Guided tours to the Omilunga region are poorly developed, and none operate specifically out of the north and the ENP.

The third impact is on the business sector, and those people in the north who might be interested in developing tourism facilities, services, outlets and related enterprises. This opportunity is denied them, because the system is not conducive to tourism development in their regions.

A recent workshop in the north concluded that the tourism potential of the region would be best achieved if (a) the whole Omilunga region is developed and marketed as one entity, under an appropriate name, (b) the focus is on historic and contemporary cultural resources and ecosystems, particularly the unique Oshana – Cuvelai system, (c) a tourism development plan (with marketing strategy) is drawn up, with emphasis on business opportunities and community participation, and (d) tourism access through the northern border of the ENP is implemented as soon as possible.

Recent research in Etosha on tourism preferences and willingness to pay has shown that there is considerable potential for tourism development north of Etosha. Initial analyses of tourism questionnaires indicate that 50,000 to 70,000 tourists per year would be interested in travelling north of the park if a gate was opened. In economic terms, and based only on traffic moving north out of the park, the potential gross economic gain to the Omilunga region would be between N\$15 million and N\$26 million per year.

2. DESCRIPTION OF WORK DONE

The study consisted of four components as follows:

- understand the current context of the work, by reviewing recent reports, workshop proceedings and general perceptions of key players
- evaluate the situation in the field, by visiting the potential gate sites and access roads, both within and to the north of, the ENP
- meet with key people, both in political office and in technical positions, to gain information, share ideas and test options, and
- review the information obtained and prepare the draft report.

2.1 Field work

2.1.1 Narawandu-Ekuma area

Field visits were made to the northern boundary of Etosha National Park. The first was to the "Narawandu" and Ekuma areas. The route was from Oshakati westwards along the Okahao road for some 40 km then south on a small sandy ungraded road that cut diagonally across the major oshanas (e.g. Shalupumbu, Owashuui, Etaka) to Uuvudhiya. The track continued due south, becoming increasingly sandy, via the two smallish salt pans of Otjivalunda and on to the Etosha boundary at the "Narawandu gate". On the park side of the gate, the road is graveled and continues south to join the tourism road at Ozonjuitji m'Bari, some 55 km west of Okaukuejo. The track via Uuvudhiya is currently the largest, most accessible and direct route to the Narawandu gate from the north, but is only suitable for four-wheel drive vehicles. There are a large number of criss-crossing and parallel tracks, particularly in the northern section. A short excursion was made to the west of the gate for about 8 km, travelling on a small winding track parallel to the park boundary and about 1 km to the north. This track visited a number of deep hand-dug water pits, used as seasonal cattle posts.

From Narawandu gate, a track cuts northeast, across the western corner of Otjivalunda saltpan no.2 and on to the north-running park boundary west of Natukanaoka pan. This section is over deep sand and is fenced on both sides of the road. Two traditional homesteads occur (the nearest to this part of Etosha) and one more modern farm headquarters with solar pumps and large water tanks. The track then runs along the park boundary to the corner on the 18° 30' parallel and continues north for 3 km, where it joins a cutline running due west. This track reaches the Ekuma River some 29-km to the west, and 3 km north of the park boundary. There is a well-worn but sandy track which runs north-south along the Ekuma river/oshana - southwards to the park boundary where it meets a track within the park which cuts down to the Etosha Pan and onwards to Okondeka waterhole, where it meets the tourism road to Okaukuejo. At the junction on the park boundary there is presently a cattle fence but no gate.

The cutline continues westwards across a number of pans, across the Gwashigambo river/oshana and ultimately to Okashana and the Ondangwa-Tsumeb road. At the time of the fieldwork (February 1999) the area to the east of the Ekuma river was too wet to travel.

From the Ekuma river/oshana, the track heads north along the Oshona floodplain and via the lakes area of Lake Oponono to Ondangwa. In this area there are a plethora of tracks criss-crossing in all directions.

The track from the north crosses mainly shallow oshana drainage lines and grassy plains with scattered palm trees, supporting a fairly dense settlement of people and their traditional family homesteads. The track winds between the homesteads, which become less abundant to the south. South of Uuvudhiya the landscape is largely unpopulated, except for some seasonal cattle posts, until the Etosha boundary, where there is a large fenced farm east of the Otjivalunda salt pans. From south of Uuvudhiya, the vegetation changes to predominantly mopane scrub, with scattered small trees and shrubs such as *Dichrostachys cinerea*, *Acacia*, *Commiphora*, *Grewia* and *Rhus* species and *Elephantorrhiza suffruticosa*. Limited patches of deeper Kalahari sand are characterised by *Terminalia sericea*. Small mud-pans are surrounded by large mopane trees. The dominant vegetation on the calcrete slopes surrounding the salt pans is *Terminalia prunioides* (large trees) and *Catophractes alexandrii* bushes. This sequence of habitats occurs throughout the area, with uniform and monotonous mopane scrub predominating.

The Ekuma river/oshana area from the park boundary northwards consists of open grassy plains, with depressions that become filled in the rainy season. In years of good rainfall in the whole catchment, the depressions spill over into the grasslands and large areas are flooded.

The area has little wildlife. Elephants pass through seasonally, and a few Steenbok and smaller mammals have been reported, while some 340 bird species have been recorded.

The main environmental threats in this area are considered to be:

- (a) off-road driving, particularly across salt pans and around the calcrete slopes leading down into the depressions, which could lead to increased erosion and visual scarring,
- (b) starting of veld fires in the dry season, which could spread over large areas because of the absence of fire breaks, and
- (c) disturbance to breeding birds of prey, such as vultures and eagles, which are known to select the *Terminalia prunioides* trees surrounding the pans as nesting sites.

These threats are considered to be of low risk.

The main issues concerning tourism in this area are considered to be:

- (a) the sandy tracks, which are suited only to four-wheel drive vehicles,
- (b) the plethora of criss-crossing tracks in the area, which will result in people becoming lost,
- (c) the isolation of the area and the lack of assistance in the event that people break down,
- (d) the fact that there is unexploded military ordnance (shells, mortars, etc.) in the area which have not yet been cleared, and
- (e) the monotony of the area, with no wildlife, which would be interesting only if people were guided to specific sites and had the environment and socio-historic context interpreted for them.

2.1.2 Andoni area

The second field visit was to the Andoni gate area. This was approached from the Ondangwa-Tsumeb tar road, turning off at Okashana and descending off the sandy vegetated dunes onto the Andoni grassy plains. This road was the former main road from Tsumeb-Namutoni-Ondangwa. The road is a fairly narrow gravel road raised about 40-60 cm above the plains so as to be passable in even quite severe flooded periods. Okashana consists of an agricultural training center, run by Rossing Foundation in association with the Ministry of Agriculture, and is some 4 km off the tar road. The Andoni gate is an additional 14 km.

The Andoni plains are a favoured grazing area for cattle. There is also a small herd of springbok outside the park (24 seen) and individual oryx and zebra. The area is the site of a proposed wildlife reintroduction by the MET, the NNEP and Rossing Foundation working in partnership with the community.

Potential environmental threats to the area are:

- (a) off-road driving, possibly people chasing after reintroduced wildlife, and
- (b) veld fires started by visitors inadvertently.

These threats are considered to be of low risk.

There are no significant constraints to tourism in the area. The road between Okashana and the Andoni gate would benefit from being scraped, but this would be of minimal cost and could be done within the ENP budget if the Ministry of Works, Transport and Communications would not be able to do it within the time-frame required.

2.1.3 Narawandu-Ekuma and Andoni areas from within the park

The Narawandu gate was visited from within the park, following the tourist route to Ozonjuitji m'Bari, then turning north onto a well-maintained gravel park management road. The road passes through mopane scrub. At the boundary the park fence (a cattle fence, regularly patrolled and in reasonable condition) was followed to the Ekuma River. From the Ekuma River, a small, poorly maintained track cuts south along to the edge of the Etosha Pan and joins the tourist road network at Okondeka waterhole some 20 km north of Okaukuejo. This track passes through grassy floodplains and overlooks the Etosha Pan, with mopane scrub and larger stands to the west. The mopane scrub habitat supports low numbers of wildlife. However, the open grassland areas around the Ekuma River and the edge of the Etosha Pan support large populations of plains game (oryx, springbok, zebra, wildebeest and ostrich) as well as most of the other wildlife species that occur in the ENP. Areas of particular diversity occur where the grasslands merge into savanna and woodland habitats (notable species include giraffe, elephant, black rhino, kudu and predators). These areas offer good opportunities for wildlife viewing, particularly under guided situations. They also offer opportunities for such guided tours to be given out as concessions, linked to access rights through the northern border of the park.

The Andoni gate area was visited from the Namutoni camp, following the tourist road north to Andoni waterhole and turning circle. From here, a well-maintained gravel road continues across the Andoni plains to the gate about 2 km further.

No anticipated environmental impacts are expected as a result of opening these areas to controlled tourism.

2.2 Meetings with key stakeholders

Meetings were held with key stakeholders (see Appendix 2) to discuss the various options. These meetings built on the work already accomplished during a workshop on tourism development in the north held in Oshakati on 26-27 January 1999. At this workshop, the delegates concluded that *"Opening of gates in the northern border of the Etosha National Park, particularly the opening of the Andoni gate is seen as vital to the initial success of tourism development. Opening of the Narawandu gate, though not seen as vital in the short term, is nevertheless important in the long-term because it would provide a larger variety of possible itineraries that include the North Western Regions."*

2.2.1 Governors and Councilors from Oshana and Oshikoto Regions

The above conclusion from the Oshakati Tourism Workshop was strongly supported by the Regional Governors and Councilors with whom discussions were held. Priority was given to the immediate opening of the Andoni gate (although representatives from the Oshana region requested that the Narawandu gate also be opened as soon as possible.) Everyone supported the notion that the Andoni gate operate at the same level and during the same times as the other park entry gates.

It was not clear when the road to the Narawandu gate area from the north would be upgraded but, as a 4x4 track, immediate opportunities for investment and income generation should be created around this site, with links to the Otjivalunda salt pans and other local attractions.

The use of tourism guides was identified as appropriate in the Narawandu area. Once the road to the Narawandu gate area has been upgraded to an appropriate standard, then this gate should also be opened as a fully functional tourism gate. The Ministry of Environment & Tourism was requested to motivate to the Ministry of Works, Transport & Communications for them to place on their priority list the upgrading of the road from the north to the Narawandu gate.

Incentives should be created for private investment north of the ENP to make use of the income-generating and job-creating opportunities resulting from tourists visiting the area.

It was unanimously agreed that only bona-fide tourists should be allowed to enter the park. No transit travelers, heavy vehicles or other forms of convenient through-traffic should be allowed. The ENP was viewed as an important part of the natural and cultural heritage of the north, both for the people living there as well as for the economic opportunities it offered. For these reasons, the park's integrity should be carefully protected.

2.2.2 Technical staff in the ENP

All technical ENP staff interviewed expressed their support for opening access through the northern border of Etosha, for the purposes of providing more ready access to the park for Namibian citizens living in the north and also to promote improved tourism-based income-earning opportunities in the north. Priority was given to the Andoni gate, because the infrastructure is already largely in place, thereby allowing for rapid implementation.

However, support was also expressed for controlled use of the Narawandu gate as well as a gate in the Ekuma area, specifically under concession arrangements, where tourists would be guided. Should the road from Narawandu northwards be upgraded in the years ahead, and the unexploded military ordnance be cleared, park staff would then strongly support a more formal tourism gate there.

2.2.3 Namibian Police

Senior police personnel in Oshakati and Windhoek immediately appreciated the developmental potential of opening access through the northern border of Etosha, as well as the importance for access to citizens living north of the park. As such, they gave the proposal their full support. The police do not need to maintain a presence at any new park gate that might be opened. However, they would always stand by if their support should be needed.

2.2.4 Veterinary Services

The Director of Veterinary Services fully appreciated the developmental potential of tourism to the north of the ENP and was fully supportive of the initiative to open access through the northern border of the park. Veterinary Services would be quite happy for the park staff (i.e. Ministry of Environment & Tourism staff) to control the gate, provided it was not used as a through-route for the transport of goods. It would thus not be necessary to appoint Veterinary Services staff for this purpose. Veterinary Services would provide the necessary information on how controls should be enforced and, if necessary, provide some training.

3. OPTIONS

There are a number of possible options to addressing the issue of gate access through the northern boundary of the ENP as follows:

- Retain the status quo – no gate
- Open a gate at Andoni only
- Open a gate at Narawandu only
- Open a gate at Ekuma only
- Open more than one gate, e.g. Andoni and Narawandu
- Open gates to different extents, e.g. open to general tourism public, or to specific tourism concession-holders

The pros and cons of opening the three gate sites identified are set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Different gate options and their pros and cons

Option	Pros	Cons
1. Status quo – no Gates	No additional costs No additional staff needed	No access to Etosha by Namibians in north No access for visitors from Etosha to north No economic opportunities in north Stagnant tourism development in north
2. Open Andoni gate	Good access from Ondangwa road All-weather gravel road both north of and in park already developed Limited infrastructure development Needed Option can be put into effect quickly Option can be effective in all but most severe floods Quickest route into park from Oshakati & Ondangwa areas Easy for tourists to find their way	Need to build gate Need to provide for staff and housing Need to upgrade road slightly Need to consider bypass of police and veterinary controls at Oshivelo
3 Open Narawandu gate	An access route into and out of park in dry season A route suitable for specialist tours A route suitable for linking to small camp and lodge developments north of park A route suitable for more general development once road to north is upgraded my MWTC and unexploded ordnance cleared by NDF in years ahead	Need to build gate Need to provide staff and accommodation Need to upgrade road slightly in park Road to north of park very sandy – 4x4 only Visitors will get lost in plethora of Tracks No support system to visitors if get stuck / break down (isolated) Track north crosses main Cuvelai system – not passable in wet season Unexploded military ordnance in area not yet cleared Habitats very monotonous unless properly interpreted by guide
4 Open gate at Ekuma	An access route into and out of park in dry season A route suitable for specialist tours A route suitable for linking to small camp and lodge developments north of park Suitable as part of a circular route, linked to Narawandu gate	Need to build gate Need to provide staff and accommodation Significant upgrading of road needed in park if for general use Road to north of park very sandy – 4x4 only Visitors will get lost in plethora of tracks No support system to visitors if get stuck / break down (isolated) Track north crosses main Cuvelai system – not passable in wet season Habitats very monotonous unless properly interpreted by guide

It is apparent from the table and from all the discussions that the first option is not acceptable, as it would hinder development in the north and deny a large part of Namibia's people access to their premier park. This option is thus rejected.

The second option of opening the gate at Andoni to general tourism is a very good option for the following reasons:

- limited infrastructure development is needed – only a gate and some road grading
- only about 2 km of additional road needs to be open to tourism within the park
- the opening of this gate would be easily done within existing park management systems
- the road outside the park is well-developed, raised above the floodplain and links within 15 km to the tar road between Tsumeb and Oshakati
- the environmental risks are very low
- the advantages to tourists and tourism in general are high and there are no apparent risks
- the gate could be developed relatively cheaply
- the gate could be in operation fairly quickly
- the opening of this gate is universally supported by all stakeholders

The third and fourth options of opening the Narawadu and Ekuma gates to general tourism are more difficult at the present time, for the following reasons:

- the gates are remote from the present tourism infrastructure and would place significant additional pressures on park management
- at least 45 km of additional road would need to be opened to tourism
- the roads north of the park are very sandy tracks presently suited only to 4x4 vehicles
- the routes cross the main Cuvelai drainage system and are impassable in the wet season
- there are a plethora of criss-crossing tracks north of the park and tourists would get lost
- lost or stranded tourists would have little assistance because of low population density and low road use in this remote area
- areas to the north of Narawandu were used, prior to Namibia's Independence, by the South African Defense Force as a training and practice ground, and contain unexploded ordnance (shells, mortars, etc.). These remote and little-used areas have not yet been cleared by the Namibia Defense Force
- the habitat north of the park is fairly monotonous and requires interpretation

The option of opening the Narawandu/Ekuma gates to specific tourism concession-holders is, alternatively, a very attractive one, because:

- these route is currently far more suited to guided tours than to self-drive visitors
- guided tours would help reduce the few environmental risks anticipated
- guided tours would reduce pressure on park management to run a remote gate
- guided tours would optimise the tourism experience and avoid the potential risks
- guided tours would help develop an exclusive tourism package in the area, thereby giving business entrepreneurs from the north an opportunity to get well established

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

In view of the above assessment, and in broad agreement with the stakeholders consulted, the following specific recommendations are made:

4.1 Andoni Gate

- Andoni gate be opened to general tourism and brought into operation as soon as possible
- The gate be operated on the same basis and to the same time schedule as the Andersson and von Lindequist gates
- The access road via Okashana be prepared by simply scraping it this season – within the park by MET and outside the park by MWTC. If the latter cannot provide this service it should be done by MET. Thereafter, MWTC should be requested to maintain the road to the park boundary
- Arrangements be made with MWTC for the erection of road signs on the Tsumeb-Ondangwa road tar road at the Okashana turn off, informing travellers of the park gate
- A gate structure should be designed and built at Andoni gate, capturing elements of the Namutoni fort as well as elements of the traditional architecture used in the north. As a first stage, the gate should have an office, toilet, store room, water tank and radio communications
- Saline-resistant materials should be specified for the construction phase (this will mainly effect the type of cement used for concrete, bricks and plaster, and the treatment of any metal used – and is not expected to effect the cost estimates in any significant way). Other potential constraints to building on a saline area with high water table can also be handled by standard means in cost-effective ways.
- Accommodation for the gate guard(s) should not be provided at the gate (at least not during the first phase) because of the isolation, lack of fresh water and power, sewage and waste disposal problems, access to schooling and community services, etc. Rather, the guard should be housed at the Okashana agricultural center, where all the necessary amenities exist and where the Directorate of Resource Management intends to locate a Ranger. The Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development has given in-principle approval for the use of Okashana by MET staff. Some simple, cost-effective transport for the ca. 14 km trip to the gate should be provided
- If accommodation is not available at Okashana, a caravan should be obtained as an interim measure until more permanent accommodation can be built. Emphasis should be placed on speedy implementation of this gate
- The issue of criminal elements learning to bypass the Oshivelo police and veterinary control point has been raised. Solutions to this have been found in association with the responsible authorities. Veterinary Services have suggested that the MET gate guard carries out the necessary inspections on their behalf, and they would provide training as necessary. The police have suggested a similar solution. They would provide back up and spot checks if necessary. In the event of unforeseen problems, they would be prepared to provide staff to work at the gate, from a planned new station at Omuthiya. As part of gate control, no transport vehicles (goods, animals, plant material) would be allowed entry through park gates, except to service official park needs

- Further investigations should be carried out by NNEP on the possible development of tourism accommodation, possibly in a traditional village style, plus a craft center at or near Okashana, linked to the hot springs and the planned wildlife reintroduction project
- An appropriate name for the Andoni gate should be sought, that has strong local and traditional links. A popular and universally supported suggestion has been the *King Nehale Gate*.

4.2 Narawandu Gate

- The Narawandu gate not be opened to the general public at this stage, because of the poor access route north of the park and because of the presence of unexploded military ordnance
- Access through this area be given out as two or three concessions, to business ventures based in the north (i.e. to business ventures headed by historically disadvantaged Namibians), and that these concessionaires be provided with keys to the gate so that they do not have to be manned by park staff
- The exclusivity of these concessions, giving access to operators and their guests to parts of the park north of existing tourist roads and into the north, be used as part of the marketing
- These concessionaires be provided or be permitted to erect small offices at Okaukuejo, from which they can run their business of attracting tourists on their tours
- These tours be allowed to operate in a flexible manner, ranging from day trips to the north, to trips of a few days with guests overnighing in facilities north of the park and then returning, to trips in which people leave the park via this route with their guides and go on elsewhere. Likewise, guests could enter the park from the north as their first point of entry
- Concessionaires be encouraged to develop overnight facilities for tourists at strategic points, such as facilities at or near the Narawandu gate – the most appropriate site perhaps being at Otjivalunda salt pan no. 1, and perhaps north of Lake Oponono in the palm tree belt
- Concessionaires also support existing and emerging tourism facilities such as the Ongozi Guest Lodge near Okahao
- Support facilities be encouraged and supported, such as traditional villages and craft markets
- Concessionaires employ and have trained good quality guides that can make optimum use of local knowledge and features, ranging from cultural-historic to ecological. This is necessary as the topography and vegetation is fairly monotonous to the uninitiated and tourists would get bored without a good interpretive service
- That a simple farm-type gate be built at the Ekuma River park border. The concessionaires operating through the Narawandu gate be given use of this gate also, so that circular routes can be developed
- Formal agreements be entered into between the concessionaires and the MET
- That the MET approach the MWTC to upgrade the road from the north to the Narawandu gate, and approach MoD to clear the area of unexploded military ordnance

- Once the road has been upgraded and explosives cleared, that the Narawandu gate be developed (MET to budget) and opened to the general tourism public as soon as possible.

4.3 Past and next steps

- The principle contents of this report were discussed with senior personnel and top management office bearers in the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, to ensure that the recommendations were correctly grounded within the policy context of the Ministry.
- This report was reviewed at the NNEP Steering Committee meeting at Ongwediva on 15th April 1999. Some concern was expressed about the impact of salinity and flooding on the gate structure to be built. On consulting with a technical expert with experienced in the Cuvelai area and receiving his written report, it was concluded that these constraints pose no real threat to the gate, neither in structure nor in costs. The recommendations in the report were accepted and endorsed by the meeting.
- Minor suggestions made by members of the NNEP Steering Committee have been incorporated into this report.
- The report was then sent to the Regional Governors of Oshana and Oshikoto on 6th May 1999. The Governor of Oshikoto expressed himself happy with the report on 25th May. The Governor of Oshana requested (by letter dated 28th May and faxed), based on a meeting of his Regional Council's Management Committee, that every effort be made to open the Naravandu Gate as soon as possible. This point of view has been reflected in the report by strengthening sections that prioritise the upgrading of roads, the clearing of military explosives and thereafter, the rapid development of the gate. However, it should be noted that in the interim phase, the allocation of concessions to business entrepreneurs from the north allows them a period of exclusivity to establish themselves securely in the tourism sector in the north.
- The report is now being forwarded to Ms Maria Kapere, Director of Resource Management, to formally table at the appropriate MET decision-making meeting(s), as agreed at the NNEP Steering Committee meeting in Ongwediva on 15th April.
- The approval of the Hon. P. Malima, Minister of MET, be obtained for the recommendations in this report
- In deemed necessary, a Cabinet Memo be prepared to inform Cabinet of the proposed developments
- Make final arrangements with the Ministry of Agriculture, Water and Rural Development for the gate guard to be housed at Okashana
- Make final arrangements with MWTC for road signs on tar road junction near Okashana
- The programme be implemented with all speed, with particular emphasis on the King Nehale Gate development
- Consideration be given to a formal gate-opening ceremony with appropriate publicity.

5. Acknowledgement

I extend my sincere thanks to Dr Stuart Kean and Dr Alex Verlinden, both of the Northern Namibia Environment Programme (NNEP), for their support and input into this work. I also thank Dr Peter Tarr, Head of the DEA, for detailed discussions on the environmental approach and issues to consider, to the members of the NNEP Steering Committee and to all the many people with whom I met to discuss their views on the development, for the keen interest and support in finding solutions for possible constraints. Finally, I thank the Hon. N. Ithete, Deputy Minister of MET, for his long-term vision and commitment to opening up the north to tourism and economic development.

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APPENDIX 1:**Terms of Reference
for an Environmental Assessment (EA)
of Tourism Access through the Northern Boundary of the Etosha National Park****Background**

The ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET), through its Northern Namibia Environmental Project (NNEP), is exploring and developing approaches to improve the quality of life of the people in the northern regions (former Owambo) through initiatives to improve natural resource management and promote sustainable development. These approaches include mechanisms and incentives for people to diversify their subsistence and economic livelihoods, and to gain benefits from previously un- and under-developed enterprises such as tourism and the use of wildlife.

A draft development plan for wildlife re-introduction and tourism for the communal areas north of Etosha National Park was compiled by the NNEP and approved by the technical planning committee of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) in November 1997. This plan aims not only to implement the vision of the President and other leaders to see wildlife re-introduced into the communal areas north of Etosha National Park (ENP), but also to create alternative sources of income for local communities by developing the tourism potential of the area using the tourist market of Etosha as an "engine of growth".

The programme also aims to provide a mechanism for the better integration of natural resource planning and management between MET staff in the Etosha National Park and those working in the communal areas in the north. The two main intentions behind this aim are to (a) improve natural resource management and view the park as particular land-use form in a mosaic of different land uses (rather than as an island), and (b) explore innovative ways in which the park can contribute to the local (as well as national) economy, thereby making it a valuable and valued partner in local development. For this to be achieved, people must benefit from their proximity to the park. In the past, communities neighbouring protected areas have had to carry the burden of problem animals and restrictions to their movements, while receiving no benefits. The potential benefits available to people in communal areas from enterprises based on resources within parks are large. These range from tourism and services related enterprises to crafts, wildlife use and value-added secondary enterprises such as the working of leather, horn and other animal products.

Tourism infrastructure in the Etosha National Park has been developed from a Windhoek perspective. The tourism market has traditionally been the overseas tourist (mainly German), the southern Africa tourist (mainly South African) and the small section of affluent Namibian holiday makers (mainly white). In the past (and even still today), little effort has been made to provide incentives and opportunities for the majority of Namibians to visit the parks. They are neither easily accessible nor affordable to the rural poor. In the case of Etosha, entry points to the park are linked to the main roads from the south, as follows: (i) Windhoek - Otjiwarongo - Outjo - Okaukuejo, (ii) Windhoek - Otjiwarongo - Tsumeb - Namutoni, and (iii) more recently and only in specific circumstances, Windhoek - Otjiwarongo - Outjo - Kamanjab - Otjivasando.

There are no entrance gates to the north of Etosha, to the most densely populated regions of Namibia, which support almost 40% of the population. Park entry by people in this region involves a trip around the park. Instead of the one way distance to the park being about 90 km (Oshakati to park boundary north of Okaukuejo), the distance is about 250 km (Oshakati to entrance gate at Namutoni). This is a psychological as well as financial disincentive for people from the north to visit the park.

With 500,000 tourists visiting Namibians each year, and over 60% of these visiting Etosha, there is considerable enterprise-development potential along the access routes to Etosha, for tourism enterprises. This is evidenced by the large number of lodges and guest farms along the routes to Etosha. Opportunities to develop these types of enterprises linked to prime tourism route are currently denied to residents and communities of the northern regions because of the location of park access gates.

With the Etosha Park stretching east-west across over 300 km in the central northern regions, and with no access for tourists through the northern boundary, the park effectively acts as a tourism barrier. This in part explains why tourism in the north is so poorly developed, despite the fact that the potential is reasonably good, particularly if linked to cultures, landscape and the park.

For these reasons, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, with support from its Northern Namibia Environment Project, is undertaking an assessment of the options, costs and benefits, of opening one or more gates and access routes through the northern boundary of the Etosha National Park.

Objective of this study

To carry out an evaluation of, and provide a report on, the environmental impacts (both positive and negative) of opening up one or more gates and access routes through, the northern boundary of the Etosha National Park, including the development of associated infrastructure, as well as anticipated secondary impacts, such as tourism developments.

Specifically, the assessment should evaluate a set of options, including

- a) no gates or tourism access through the northern boundary of Etosha
- b) one access route north of Namutoni across the Andoni plains
- c) two access routes, one as in (b) and a second north of Okaukuejo on the west bank of the Ekuma river, through Naravandu
- d) two access routes, one as in (b) and a second some 40 km west of Okaukuejo, through Otjivalunda.

The assessment should provide a comprehensive evaluation of the positive and negative aspects associated with the above four options, should recommend mitigatory actions to reduce negative impacts and ways to further enhance positive impacts. The assessment should also consider phasing and timing of potential developments.

The potential impacts of the proposed development should be evaluated in three main areas:

- (i) impacts on the Etosha Park
- (ii) impacts at the site of the gate
- (iii) impacts to the north of the park in the communal lands

As part of the comprehensive evaluation, the assessment should address, *inter alia*, the following:

- increased road use and access by tourists to areas not previously accessible, with possible impact on sensitive ecosystems (e.g. wetlands and *ombuga* grasslands), disturbance to threatened species, possible poaching (eg rhino), increased dust along roadways;
- seasonality of access, present road alignments, possible changes to roadways, maintenance requirements and impacts, types of road developments(2x4 or 4x4);
- gate developments, infrastructure servicing (water, power, sewage, domestic waste), occupation, staff use of northern routes, control mechanism, policy environment;
- related tourism developments, both within park and outside, and links to other tourism attractions/routes (including to salt mine, Lake Oponono Area, cultural tourism, link to Ruacana and Okavango), including potential for circular route back into park;
- potential impact on park management and on communal farmers north of park, including potential for diversified markets;
- veterinary considerations regarding potential spread of livestock diseases and implications for enforcement of regulations;
- implications for policing at the gates;
- legal implications of opening gates and the procedures which should be followed if the gates are to be opened.

The assessment should include a site visit to evaluate impacts of the four options on the park and the areas to the north. The views of the following groups should be canvassed:

- MET field staff Etosha and in Northern 4 "O" regions
- Senior and specialist MET staff in Windhoek
- Selected tourism organisations, including NACOBTA (keeping in mind that a tourism workshop in the north gives clear guidance on the general principle of park access)
- Governors and councillors for the regions
- Ministry of Home Affairs
- Directorate of Veterinary Services.

Work programme and time schedule

- 7 days- field visit: visit gate sites, travel along roads, meet MET field staff and regional councillors
- 3 days- interviews in Windhoek: canvass views of MET staff, tourism sector, Home affairs and Directorate of Veterinary Services
- 4 days- prepare report: prepare concise report on options, impacts, mitigation and recommendations.

The field visit will be undertaken between 18-24th February, followed by interviews with key stakeholders in Windhoek between 25-27th February. The draft report will be completed by 21st March and the final report including revisions based on comments received will be finalised by 9th April 1999.

Appendix 2

PEOPLE CONSULTED AS PART OF THIS STUDY

Hon. P. Malima	Minister of Environment and Tourism
Hon. N. Ithete	Deputy Minister of Environment and Tourism
Mr. C.H. Kashiupulwa	Governor of the Oshana Region
Mr. V. Kamanya	Governor of the Oshikoto Region
Mr. J. Mupetami	Regional Councilor of Okatjali
Mr. I. Muguage	Regional Councilor of Ondangwa
Ms. L. Nelongo	Regional Councilor of Ompundja
Mr. SPH Amutenya Ndahafa	Regional Councilor for Uuvudhiya
Mr. M. Amadhila	Regional Councilor for Uukwiva
Mr. M. Aram	Regional Councilor for Oshakati-west
Mr. B.S. Munalye	Regional Officer for the Oshana Region
Ms. M. Kapere	Director of Resource Management, MET
Mr. L. van Rooyen	Deputy Director Resource Management, MET
Mr. P. Erb	Chief Warden: Etosha National Park, MET
Mr. C. Eyre	Chief Warden: "Four O" region, MET
Mr. P. Tarr	Acting Head: Directorate of Environmental Affairs, MET
Maj. Genl. F.S. Nghiishililwa	Deputy Inspector General, Namibian Police
Dept. Comm. T.J. M'lukeni	Deputy Regional Comm. Northern Regions, Namibian Police
Dr. J. Shaw	Director, Veterinary Services, MAWRD
Dr. S. Kean	Project Leader: Northern Namibia Environmental Project
Dr. A. Verlinden	Ecologist / GIS Specialist: Northern Namibia Environmental Project

