

# **REPORT ON THE IUCN EVALUATION MISSION TO NAMIBIA**

## **NAMIB SAND SEA NOMINATION DOSSIER**

**16 to 26 September 2012**

### **1. Introduction**

The Namibia National Commission for UNESCO has submitted the Namib Sand Sea to UNESCO World Heritage Centre in February 2012 on behalf of Namibia for consideration and possible inscription on the World Heritage List. In order to qualify for the World Heritage status, a site must be of outstanding universal value (OUV), and be nominated under special criteria of (i) superlative natural phenomena, outstanding natural beauty and aesthetic importance; (ii) outstanding example representing major stages of earth's history, significant ongoing geological processes in the development of land forms and significant geomorphic and physiographic features; (iii) outstanding example representing significant ongoing ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial ecosystems and communities of plants and animals; and (iv) most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity, including those containing threatened species of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science or conservation.

After confirming the completeness of the dossier, the World Heritage Centre forwarded the Dossier to the relevant Advisory Body to the World Heritage Committee namely, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It was against this background that IUCN undertook an evaluation mission to Namibia from 16 to 26 September 2012.

The objectives of the IUCN mission, as communicated to the Namibia National Commission for UNESCO, were:

- To become familiar with all aspects of the nominated property and double check that the nomination dossier is complete;
- To review the property boundaries and buffer zone boundaries;
- To evaluate the management system and management effectiveness;
- To review actual and potential threats to the property; and
- To evaluate local support for the nomination.

## 2. Programme of the IUCN Mission

Dr. Peter Charles Howard, a British national, based in Kenya, and Dr. Darlington Munyikwa from Zimbabwe (IUCN team) visited Namibia from 16 to 26 September 2012 to evaluate the Namib Sand Sea. The team, accompanied by members of the National and Technical Committees on the implementation of the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage met with relevant authority and other stakeholders as follows:

### 17 September 2012

- **Courtesy call on Ministers** of Education, Mines, and Energy, Environment and Tourism, and Youth National Service, Sport and Culture. Deputy Minister of Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture chaired the meeting. Hon. Isak Katali and members of the National and technical Committees on the implementation of the 1972 Convention (Dr. Gabi Schneider -MME, Ms. Frieda Kanime- NATCOM, Ms. Erica Ndalikokule- NHC, Mr. Penda Shimali- MET, Ms. Esther Moombolah-Goagoses- NMN, and Mr. Eugene Marais- NMN) attended the meeting. The aim of the courtesy call was to brief the Ministers on the objective of the mission, and the activities that would be carried out during the mission, and the process of nominating sites to the world Heritage List. The Ministers welcomed the team to Namibia.
- **Meeting with technical experts** from the ministries of Mines and Energy, Environment and Tourism, and National Museum of Namibia. The aim of the meeting was to gain an understanding and get clarity on technical and management issues regarding the nominated site. Issues of prospective areas and issuance of mining licenses, and buffer zones were clarified. Dr. Gabi Schneider-MME, Mr. Eugene Marais-NMN, Mr. Penda Shimali- MET and Ms. Frieda Kanime-NATCOM attended the meeting.
- **Meeting with the NGOs:** Desert Research Foundation of Namibia (DRFN), Namibia Nature Foundation (NNF), and Namibia Protected Landscape Conservation Areas Initiatives (NAMPLACE). The aim of the meeting was to establish the involvement of the NGOs in the Nomination of the Namib Sand Sea, and to provide comments and their general impression on the site and its management. Mr. John Pallet represented the DRFN and the NNF, while Mr. Jonas Heita represented NAMPLACE. The NGOs are highly involved in the protection and conservation of the park including the nominated site. They assist the Ministry of Environment in nature and wildlife conservation and management issues. Both NGOs welcomed the idea to nominate the Namib Sand Sea as a World Heritage site as this status would attract more tourists and boost the economy

of the country. However, they raised concern on a number of threats: tourism impact (water needed), dry area with low rainfall, flooding in the catchment area (aquifer), dependency on underground water, waste management, no central collection place, shortage of management staff and lack of capacity building. Mr. Eugene Marais and Ms. Frieda Kanime attended the meeting.

### **18 September 2012**

- Tour of the Museum of the Geological Survey of Namibia. Dr Gabi Schneider, chairperson of the Technical Committee of the 1972 Convention took the team around the museum and explained a number of issues related to the nominations especially in the areas on mining. Ms. Frieda Kanime accompanied the team.

### **19 September 2012**

- **Courtesy call on the Governor of Erongo Region.** Ms. Adelheid Kandjala, special advisor to the Governor represented the Governor who was out of town to attend to other official duties. The team briefed Ms Kandjala on the objective of the mission, the activities that would be carried out during the mission, and the process of nominating sites to the world Heritage List. Ms Kandjala welcomed the team to Erongo Region and wished them well in their mission. She fully endorsed the nomination and emphasized that the Namib Desert is indeed extremely special. She expressed her conviction that the review team will definitely not escape the beauty of our desert. Dr. Gabi Schneider-MME, Mr. Eugene Marais-NMN, Mr. Penda Shimali- MET and Ms. Frieda Kanime-NATCOM, and Ms. Erica Ndalikokule- NHC attended the meeting.
- **Meeting with the NGOs based at the Coast:** Coastal Environmental Trust of Namibia (CETN), and Namibia Coastal Conservation and Management Project (NACOMA). Ms. Susan Roux from CETN and Ms Raily Hasheela from NACOMA attended the meeting. The aim of the meeting, as with the NGOs met in Windhoek, was to solicit comments and information regarding the nomination site, and to get impression of what is being done around the Namib Sand Sea.
- The two NGOs expressed happiness with the idea of nominating the Namib Sand Sea as the World Heritage Site, however raised concern on the disappearance of some animals that are no longer visible in the area due to scarcity of water and human influence.
- The other concern raised was the silting up of lagoon, which is, however, not part of the nominated site.

- Further concerns were as follows: threat of pollution, which mainly affects the area of Walvis Bay, which is outside the nominated area; tourism appears to be out of control, and tour guides do not know how to behave in protected areas. If the Namib Sand Sea will be proclaimed, serious education measures need to be put in place in order to inform each and every Namibian and Namibia's visitors about the reasons for protecting the Sand Sea; the convoy tours from Lüderitz to Walvis Bay and from Sossusvlei to Walvis Bay were singled out as being especially problematic, as they happen too frequently and with too many cars. The MET regulation of 12 cars is violated on a regular basis. The fact that vehicles testing in the dunes was allowed because the Topnaar traditional authority lobbied MET was also mentioned. The resulting damage was apparently substantial. Photo shoots and film-making further contributes to the deterioration of the desert; proper procedures are often not followed, and licenses for all kind of activities are granted before all stakeholders are consulted (e.g. Topnaar – car testing issue).
- NACOMA mentioned the SEAs for the Hardap and Karas coast which were undertaken by the project. The SEAs are updated on an annual basis. Tourism and development pressure were identified as potential threats to the area. The tourism pressure relates to activities that were also mentioned by CETN, and development pressure in the inhospitable waterless area are mainly a result of Namibians not having enough knowledge of the area. NACOMA project has also trained MET personnel in law enforcement, to be able to deal with the transgressions mentioned above, as well as airborne monitoring.
- Dr. Gabi Schneider-MME, Mr. Eugene Marais-NMN, Mr. Penda Shimali- MET and Ms. Frieda Kanime-NATCOM, and Ms. Erica Ndalikokule- NHC attended the meeting.

## **20 September 2012**

- The review team visited the Sandwich Harbour.
- **Meeting with the Topnaar Regional Authority:** Chief Seth Kooitjie accompanied by his son and one member of the Topnaar Community, as well as accompanying members of the National and Technical Committees (Dr. Gabi Schneider-MME, Mr. Eugene Marais-NMN, Mr. Penda Shimali- MET and Ms. Frieda Kanime-NATCOM, and Ms. Erica Ndalikokule- NHC) also attended the meeting.
- As with the meetings held with other stakeholders, the aim of the meeting was to exchange views and to solicit comments and inputs from the Topnaar community which has lived in the Naukluft Park for many years. Chief Kooitjie gave a historical background of the Topnaars, the first inhabitants of the coast.
- The Topnaar community became a member of the Gobabeb Desert Research station ten years ago.

- They extend their livelihood with whatever they can find in the desert. The Kuiseb River plays an important role in this.
- The community has utilized the opportunity to work Gobabeb and expressed their opinion on research topics.
- The community does not take visitors into the desert, as this is in general not possible, because it is a protected area, however, they have a small 4x4 concession, where people can go to Conception Bay and come back via the high dunes.
- With regards to the nomination of the Namib Sand Sea as a World Heritage Site, Chief Kooitjie welcomed the idea and informed that the Namib Sand Sea is a special place with special conservation requirements, which is also recognized worldwide, and not only in Namibia.
- The Chief expressed fear that traditional habitat of the community might be affected by the World Heritage status, and future generations might not have the kind of access enjoyed by the current generation. This is particularly the case with !Nara harvest, which partly takes place in the nominated area. If the Topnaar people would no longer be allowed into the area, they would lose their culture.
- The Topnaar Chief called for the development/land right to be recognized and preserved. Currently, the community is living on State proclaimed land. The Chief also called for alignments of concessions and tourism rights in order for the community to benefit from the site. He would like his community to be allowed to pay respect to their ancestors who are buried in the park. Currently, they have to obtain permission from the authorities to do that, and it is a lengthy process.

In response, the review team indicated that in contrast, there would be economic opportunities for the communities, such as the living museum which has developed next to Twyfelfontein World Heritage site. Visitors could be introduced to the way of life of the Topnaar people, including their unique relationship with the !Nara plant. It was further mentioned that access would definitely not be denied.

The Chief mentioned that historically, the Topnaar people have always been disadvantaged, however, in general they are very happy about the development to proclaim the Namib Sand Sea a World Heritage site, as they will now have a world recognized site on their doorstep, which they can take advantage in terms of tourism. Due to the rich cultural and traditional heritage of his people, even other population groups in Namibia could benefit economically through tourism. He informed the review team that the community is involved in tourism development in the Dorob Park. With regards to how he sees the relationship of his community with the World Heritage site, the chief responded that the Topnaar people see the area as their heritage, and as long as the unique history of his people is conserved so that their cultures, traditions and rights are recognized to have a right of development, even if they are just

neighbours, there is no problem. At present, the land rights of the Topnaar people are not formally recognized, and they live on State Land. He emphasized that his people should not be marginalized, but be involved from the very beginning in all planning and decision-making. The Chief PS, who is also his son mentioned, as a youngster of the community that it is an important demand by the young Topnaar people that they will be able to get concession areas in the area to be proclaimed, so that it can contribute to the economic development of the Topnaar people. To this end, it was suggested that a visit be paid to the community living in the vicinity of Twyfelfontein World Heritage site to exchange views with them and also see how they have benefited from the enhanced status of the heritage site.

- **Request:** the Chief requested the IUCN team to reflect his concerns and comments in their final report, and share some of their findings with him, so that he can inform his community. He also requested that the Topnaar people be offered jobs in the MET structure which needs to be filled to deal with the new tasks once the area is proclaimed.

#### **21 September 2012**

- **Meeting with Dr. Mary Seely (Desert Foundation of Namibia - DRFN):**
- The team met with Dr. Seely at the Gobabeb Desert Research Station, at looked at the settlements and activities of the Topnaar people, who live in the proposed buffer zone.
- The team also solicited comments from her as a long standing member of DRFN. She emphasized the importance of sustainability, and also talked about the current uranium activities. She underlined the importance of not allowing speculative exploration licenses, and the fact that such licenses would be a real threat to the nomination of the site.
- Furthermore, she commented on the tourist facilities, in particular sanitation, and gave the terrible conditions of the facilities at Sossusvlei as an example. The World Heritage inscription will definitely increase tourism, and this issue therefore needs immediate attention.
- Another reason for concern for Gobabeb are the 4x4 tours conducted through the Namib Sand Sea, as numbers of vehicles are currently too big. Lodges along the coast should also be carefully considered because of their implications for groundwater.
- She also stated that the Topnaar people want to profit from tourism, which is their good right, but they do not want to invest. They are only allowed to harvest wood for their own use, and keep cattle and other animals for their own subsistence, but they engage in commercial agriculture and sell wood to tourists.
- Another aspect she mentioned is the science carried out by Gobabeb, which could benefit tremendously from being carried out on the fringes of a World Heritage site, and

would probably increase significantly. This would in turn, ease Gobabeb's plight to constantly look for funding, as more research would guarantee more funding.

- With regards to management, it was noted that the Government's position on mining is clear after the Cabinet decision to cancel and not to renew exploration licenses in the nominated area.
- Members of the National and Technical Committees that accompanied the team also attended this meeting.

## **22 September 2012**

- The review team and members of the National and Technical Committees who accompanied the review team participated in the Gobabeb Open Day and 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations.
- At noon, the group departed from Gobabeb by plane and the technical experts (Dr. Schneider and Dr. Marais) gave the review team an overview of the Namibia Sand Sea from the air. Areas of particular interest, which were pointed out to them were the Kuiseb Canyon, Tsondab Vlei, the various dune forms, the wreck of the Eduard Bohlen, the historical diamond mining activities, the salt flats, Conception Bay, Meob Bay, Fischersbrunn, witberge as an example for inselbergs, Sossusvlei and finally the Sesriem Canyon. Upon landing at Sesriem, we accompanied the team on a tour through the Sesriem Canyon, where Dr. Schneider gave an overview of the development of the Namib during the last 128 million years. The day ended with climbing the Elim dune.

## **23 September 2012**

- Drive before sunrise from Sesriem to Sossusvlei, where we first visited the dead pan. The review team was introduced to climatology and geomorphology of the area, and thereafter, we visited the Sossusvlei, where we looked at the vlei itself before climbing the high dune in order to see the geologically older vleis to the west of the current one. The dynamics of the Namib Sand Sea and the resulting ever changing face of the Tsauchab River at its end were discussed here with the team.
- Visit of the NWR and MET at Sesriem where management of tourism, as well as potential problematic issues, such as staffing, funding, and problems with tourists were discussed.
- **Threats:** the managers identified some of the threats and concerns in managing the Park: high influx of tourists; lack of cooperation from the tourists in respecting the designated areas of driving and speed limit; shortage of staff to manage the large Park; lack of proper training for the staff.

**24 September 2012**

- **Meeting with the staff of the Wilderness Safaris, and the manager of Namibia Sky Balloon Safaris:** The team could not fly with the balloon that morning as planned due to unfavorable weather conditions. However, a short working breakfast was held at the manager's residence prior to departure, to solicit views on the Sand Sea Nomination and management issues of the Park.
- The staff of the Wilderness Safaris supports the proclamation of the Namib Sand Sea as a World Heritage Site as this would contribute to the protection and effective management of the site. It would also boost tourism and economic growth for the country.
- They indicated that MET should administer stricter conditions and fines for non-compliance. This is even more important in view of the fact that World Heritage status will increase the tourism pressure, which is currently very high. They advised the Ministry of Environment to consider a system of *honorary guides* to assist with the management of the site. They would be happy to offer their service in this regard.
- The group returned to Windhoek via Spreekshoogte Pass. At the top of Spreekshoogte pass, an overview of the geology of the Great Escarpment was given.
- **De-briefing with representatives of the MOE and MET:** The team debriefed representatives of Ministers on the areas they visited and the activities they carried out.
- **The reviewer raised the following points:** *the quarry and people living in the buffer zone and inside the Namib Naukluft Park; they were impressed with the scope of the place; they realized the complexity of dune systems and how special they are on a global basis; they saw the special biodiversity; they have compared the Namib Sand Sea with other natural World Heritage sites on the African continent, it is very different; they recognized the huge amount of work done for the nomination; they will compare the Namib Sand Sea on a global level with biodiversity, endemism, geology, ecology and natural beauty.*
- **They also identified the following threats to the site:** *upstream damming of Tsauchab River- water catchment outside the nominated property is influencing the integrity of the site; mining- cancel existing licenses; tourism threat such as off-road driving (only partly addressed through concession arrangement, i.e. the*

*Lüderitz-Walvis Bay off-road tours; flying over vulture nests (increased flight levels); alien species; and fire.*

- They will compile their report and provide recommendations to IUCN. The World Heritage Panel, which will meet in December 2012, will agree on what information should be presented to the 37<sup>th</sup> Session of the World Heritage Committee in 2013.

### **Suggestions and recommendations from the IUCN team and the stakeholders on general management issues**

- There are two different management plans, one for the nominated site, which is not an operational one and which lacks zonation; and one for the Namib Naukluft Park, which is in a draft form. The two management plans need to be harmonized, and must be operational and have specific zoning.
- There is a great need for a good interpretative centre (visitors' reception).
- Staffing matters should be attended to as a matter of urgency. Tourism level has grown while MET staffing is inadequate.
- Build capacity of MET staff on management issues.
- The legislation is inadequate, and there is no separate legislation for World Heritage site. Legislation need to be improved to deal with the site once it is proclaimed.
- The Cabinet decision to cancel mining licenses should be communicated in writing to the World Heritage Committee, as this decision would make Namibia's case stronger and push the decision of the Committee.
- A map with current prospecting licenses should be provided.
- A zoning map is needed to indicate prohibited areas for tourists and visitors.
- Measures to curb the noise pollution from aircrafts should be put in place and reinforced.

### **3. Conclusion**

The visit to the site was worthwhile as many issues discussed and areas identified in the nomination document were clarified. However, seen from the visit of the site and concerns raised by stakeholders, there is still a lot to done, especially with regards to management matters. It is hoped that all the concerns raised would be addressed before the World Heritage Committee meets in July 2013.