

CEO'S MEDIA ADDRESS - 28 January 2002

On the 4th of December this year, 2002, the Southern Hemisphere will experience a total eclipse of the sun. The totality path includes four areas under the jurisdiction of SANParks. The northern part of the Kruger National Park has four areas that fall under the totality path and these are: Punda Maria Gate, Punda Maria, Mopani and Shingwedzi. The longest totality of the eclipse will be experienced at Shingwedzi and this will last for 86 seconds. The duration of totality in the other camps is as follows: Mopani – 45 second, Punda Maria – 77 seconds and Punda Maria Gate – 82 seconds. The town of Messina will also also experience a totality, which will last for 76 seconds.

Our concern as SANParks obviously lies in the totality areas within the northern part of the Kruger National Park. There are a few key factors that should be clarified to create a better understanding of how the organisation handled bookings for the nights of the 3rd and 4th of December. Media reports have indicated that all accommodation in the park is fully booked for the night before the eclipse and this is true. There have also been reports of accommodation not being available on the 2nd of January when bookings opened and this is an issue we hope to have clarified by the end of this meeting. We have, as well, received several complaints from the public, who said they could not get bookings on the 2nd because preference had been given to foreign scientists. We are aware of public dissatisfaction expressed on radio talk shows, the printed press and directly to us via e-mail and other channels.

These are the facts regarding bookings for accommodation for the night in question:

Early last year, tour operators representing certain foreign scientific interest groups, needing accommodation for the night of December 3rd, approached SANParks with requests for accommodation. We then asked the travel trade to make applications for accommodation in this regard on the basis that the price payable was that prevailing at the time plus a 20% premium and for two nights. Accompanying the application was an irrevocable guarantee for the full proceeds of the request.

The allocation of accommodation was given to the following tour operators:

- Incentive Touring
- Wilderness Safaris
- ICSA
- African Outpost
- Outback Africa
- Thompsons Tours

These pre-allocations were done with the understanding that the tour operators represent certain foreign scientific interest groups.

In November 2001, a press release was issued explaining that bookings for 2002 would open on January 2nd, 2002. The same press release also indicated that most of the accommodation in the northern part of the park had already been pre-allocated to the scientific interest groups. A copy of the press release in question is available on our website: www.parks-sa.co.za.

Members of the public, who had sent in requests for accommodation ahead of time, had those returned with an explanation that bookings would open in the new year on a first come first serve basis. Whether this information reached all concerned on time if at all, SANParks cannot confirm.

What we can confirm is the number of units that were available for bookings on the morning of January 2nd 2002 when bookings opened.

The breakdown is as follows:

Mopani

	Amount	Amount	Amount booked
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Units	available	pre-booked	on 2/1/2002
Bungalows	45	43	2
Cottages	12	0	12
Guest Cottages	45	10	35
Guest House	1	0	1
TOTAL	103	53	50

Shingwedzi

Units	Amount available	Amount pre-booked	Amount booked on 2/1/2002
Huts	25	25	0
Bungalows	54	54	0
Cottages	1	0	1
Guest House	1	0	1
Camping	50	20	30
TOTAL	131	99	32

Punda Maria

Units	Amount available	Amount pre-booked	Amount booked on 2/1/2002
Bungalows	22	22	0
Cottages	2	2	0
Camping	50	50	0

The other camps nearby:

Letaba has 160 units of which 58 were pre-booked

Olifants has 112 of which 54 were pre-booked.

- SANParks is working on a few measures, which will ensure that more people get to see the eclipse in the park.

It has been decided that on the morning of the 4th, gates at Orpen, Phalaborwa and Punda Maria will open at 4am instead of the usual 6am to allow more people time to get in.

- We have embarked on an urgent project, to erect temporary camping facilities in the northern Kruger for the night of December 3rd. An Environmental Impact Assessment committee in the KNP will give a report in two weeks time, which will indicate how much temporary accommodation can be put in place so that we may take more bookings.
- All visitors will be allowed to leave their vehicles to view the eclipse between. 8am and 9am. Again we will get guidelines from the EIA committee on how this should work.

SANParks cannot ignore the fact that a lot of South Africans feel that the interests of foreign scientific interest groups were put before theirs. We also recognise that there are members of the public who sent in requests in advance, and could not get bookings on January 2nd. Some members of the public had not sent in requests, but had simply been told that bookings would open on this day, but were disappointed when they were told that everything was fully booked within a matter of minutes.

It is the organisation's wish to extend an apology to all those affected. Perhaps with better communication, this could have turned out differently. Unfortunately an event like this is a rarity, and we can never get an opportunity to make it up to them. All the written complaints that we have received are being kept. We advise that all those people who can prove that they had been on some sort of waiting list before November 2001 send their complaints to us in writing. It would then be possible to give them first preference when the temporary accommodation is ready for bookings

Once again we apologise for any inconvenience that the public might have experienced. There have been a lot of lessons learnt that will ensure that such mistakes are not repeated in the future.

END

Any responses to this message can be sent to:

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