

**OVISTON NATURE RESERVE
Eastern Cape Province**

STAKEHOLDER REPORT

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Unpublished report

CONTENTS

A. Purpose and methodology of the study	2
B. The social environment of the Oviston Nature Reserve	3
1. Overview of the area	3
2. Developmental priorities of the Gariep Local Municipality	4
3. Developmental priorities of the Ukhahlamba District Municipality	6
C. Issues raised by stakeholders	7
1. Access control	8
2. Security issues	8
3. Outsourcing	8
4. Fishing in the Gariep Dam	9
5. Environmental awareness and problem plants	11
6. Game culling and sales.....	11
7. Small business: Crafts and agriculture	12
8. Promoting tourism.....	12
9. Fire protection	13
10. Problem animals.....	14
12. Wood collection and birdlife.....	14
D. The Stakeholder Forum.....	15
E. The results of the participatory exercise	23

A. Purpose and methodology of the study

The National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act, 2003 promotes mechanisms in place to engage local communities in protected areas. It further states that park plans must be compiled in consultation with a wide range of interested and affected parties and calls for management plans to put procedures in place for public participation. Park forums are put in place by SANParks in order to comply with the Act.¹

Furthermore, the South African Protected Areas Act requires that each park develops a Management Plan. Such a plan is prepared in consultation with municipalities, other organs of state, local communities and any other affected parties which have an interest in the area.²

Consequently, the drafting of the Oviston Nature Reserve Management Plan requires a stakeholder participation process. It is likely that a wide range of stakeholders will identify numerous issues and problems which have direct or indirect relevance to the Reserve, which may extend its involvement into areas which were not previously regarded as being within its strict jurisdiction. By bringing together “people and parks”, there will be an inevitable blurring and admixture of issues, interests, roles, responsibilities, and rights. This institutional “messiness” is an inevitable aspect of development.

In the case of ONR, the nature reserve borders on a small village, commercial farms, municipal commonages, and a larger town. These localities are home to middle-class, working-class and unemployed people, with different interests, experiences, capacities and world-views. This situation is somewhat different from “deep rural” nature reserves, where the typical neighbours tend to be traditional communities and commercial farmers.

The research process highlights this diversity of social forms and settings, and attempts to show the wide range of issues which stakeholders regarded as relevant. This will pose new challenges to the ONR management in future. During the research process, a Stakeholder Forum was held, as the first step in an on-going process of regular consultation. It is likely that this consultative process will yield many new challenges, which will affect the interests of ONR as well as its neighbours. It will be very important to build up the institutional strength and integrity of the Forum as a problem-solving body, capable of resolving complex conflicts and undertaking multi-faceted development initiatives.

The large number of delegates to the first Forum meeting (a total of 42 participants) and the enthusiastic involvement of the participants in the discussions, bodes well for its future activities. The delegates responded positively to the ONR management’s desire for public involvement. This appeared to create a basis of trust, on which future discussions and initiatives can build.

¹ <http://www.sanparks.org/people/social/research/priorities.php>
² <http://www.sanparks.org/people/social/research/priorities.php>

A. The social environment of the Oviston Nature Reserve

1. Overview of the area

ONR started as a purely conservation project, mainly to manage game. Subsequently, it was transferred from a Department of Nature Conservation to DEDEA (Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs), with a stronger focus on tourism.

ONR must now be understood within the context of the Integrated Development Plans of the Local and District Municipalities.

Oviston Nature Reserve (ONR) is situated alongside the small town of Oviston, and about 10 km from the town of Venterstad. These towns form part of Gariep Local Municipality, which has its headquarters in Burgersdorp, about 60 km away.

The spatial structure of municipalities now means that municipal decision-making powers is often located far from smaller towns and localities. Oviston, for example, does not have its own Councillor on the Gariep Local Council; it depends on Councillors living in Venterstad and the farming area surrounding Oviston. This “political distance” inevitably means that it is more difficult for local issues to be raised on the Council of a large municipality.

The municipality covers a spatial area of 8 344 km². The population is 31 303, and is 73% urbanised.

Table 1: Population in the Gariep Local Municipality

Town	Population 1996	Percentage of municipal population 1996	Population 2001	Percentage of municipal population, 2001
Burgersdorp	13 301	41 %	13 540	43%
Venterstad	4 550	14	4 259	14
Steynsburg	6 510	20	6 658	21
Oviston	601	2	560	2
Rural	7 462	23 %	6269	20
TOTAL	32 424	100	31 286	100% (rounded off)

These figures suggest that the population of Burgersdorp and Steynsburg have increased slightly between 1996 and 2001, whereas Venterstad and Oviston decreased slightly – possibly due to perceived economic decline. The population of the rural area decreased significantly. The overall population declined by 1138 people, suggesting out-migration from this area, possibly towards larger growth poles elsewhere in the Eastern Cape.

The landscape is characterised by extensive farmland (mainly sheep and game farming), interspersed by towns, which are generally located about 60 km apart.

Unemployment levels are high in the Venterstad magisterial district:

Table 2: Unemployment in Venterstad

	1990	1996 ³	2001 ⁴
Employment	58.9%	46.%	36%
Informal employment	6.1%	12.2%	
Unemployment	27.4	40.1%	38.7%

During the 1990s, the dramatic increase in unemployment in the Venterstad Magisterial district suggested that the urban economy declined, although unemployment figures were also probably increased by rapid in-migration of unemployed farm workers. A slight decline in employment in percentage of unemployed people between 1996 and 2001 may suggest that unemployed people have left the area in search of work.

The extent of poverty in Gariep Local Municipality is shown by the fact that 17% of the households earned no income at all (census 2001), and 17% earned below R5 000 per annum.⁶ In 1996, at least 60% of households in Venterstad were living below the subsistence level (compared to 62% in Steynsburg and 72% in Burgersdorp).⁷ However, Gariep Local Municipality finds itself within a sea of even more intense poverty. Compared with the other municipalities in Ukhahlamba District, Gariep is the most affluent. (For example, in Elundini LM, 80.6% of the households earn less than R1 500 per month).⁸

In 1999, the predominant type of employment in the Venterstad Magisterial District was Agriculture (28.4%), followed by Community Services (19.1%), Households (18.9%), Construction (14.7%), Trade (8.4%), Manufacturing (6.3%) and Transport (3.3%).¹¹

The area is too dry for crop-farming, unless irrigation is provided.¹² There are emergent farmers in Venterstad, grazing livestock on the municipal commonage. These farmers are also interested in irrigation cropping.

The only other potential growth area is tourism. At a provincial level, the Gariep Dam area has been identified as a key tourism development node.¹³

The towns are still largely based on apartheid-era design, with black townships located at some distance from the central business districts. A significant shift is taking place in Venterstad and Steynsburg, where black people have purchased properties within the “old white town”.

There are three schools in Venterstad (one high school and two primary schools), and one primary school in Oviston.

2. Developmental priorities of the Gariep Local Municipality

The municipal developmental priorities are:

³ Gariep Local Municipality, *Integrated Development Plan*, 2002, pp. 12.

⁴ http://sandmc.pwv.gov.za/comp/Profiles/Provincial_Profiles/EC_Ukhahlamba.htm

⁶ www.demarcation.org.za.

⁷ Gariep Local Municipality, *Integrated Development Plan*, 2002, pp. 13.

⁸ ECSECC, *Ukhahlamba: Socio-economic Profile*, 2007, p. 22.

¹¹ Gariep Local Municipality, *Integrated Development Plan*, 2002, pp. 13.

¹² Gariep Local Municipality, *Integrated Development Plan*, 2002, pp. 10.

¹³ Eastern Cape Spatial Development Framework, 2003, p. 45.

1. Unemployment, poverty and crime
2. Infrastructure – upgrading and extension
3. Housing and electricity
4. Accountability and management.

The municipality lists numerous community developmental priorities, some of which have a direct bearing on Oviston Nature Reserve.¹⁴ These include:

- A general lack of job opportunities and ways to make an income
- There is great potential for local and regional tourism as a form of job creation – this must be developed
- The money generated in the Oviston Nature Reserve should be used to the benefit of the residents in the area
- Access to the water of the Gariep Dam must be facilitated – for irrigation purposes. This includes the dam itself, as well as the Fish River Tunnel
- Local roads are in drastic need of upgrading.¹⁵

The municipality set itself several developmental goals, some of which have a bearing on ONR:¹⁶

1. Upgrading of the road between Venterstad and Steynsburg, as well as between Venterstad and Gariep Dam
2. Establishment of a Tourist Committee (this has indeed been done, with the creation of Community Tourism Organisations and Local Tourism Organisations)
3. Agreement with the Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs about utilising the money generated in ONR to develop tourism potential in the area
4. Development of an African village (this was indeed attempted at Venterstad, but it collapsed)
5. Upgrading the recreational facilities in the Gariep area
6. Job creation: 50 Irrigation farmers to be established near the dam, by 2005
7. Job creation: Create a fishing project in Venterstad
8. Environmental Health Programme: Environmental education, including reducing littering and promoting tree-planting
9. Disaster Management in the Gariep area, and a Disaster Management Plan must be compiled
10. Development of tourism resources at the dam, and linking with district initiatives (this is indeed proceeding, as part of the Lake !Gariep “Tri-District Alliance”, including Xhariep District in the Free State and Pixley ka Seme District in the Northern Cape).
11. Oviston Nature Reserve and dam area must be attractive to tourists, including a tunnel festival, water sports, marathon, the Venterstad African Village and an Oviston Recreational Area (swimming pool and caravan park).
12. Capacitate local community to participate in the tourism industry.

¹⁴ Gariep Local Municipality, *Integrated Development Plan*, 2002, pp. 17.

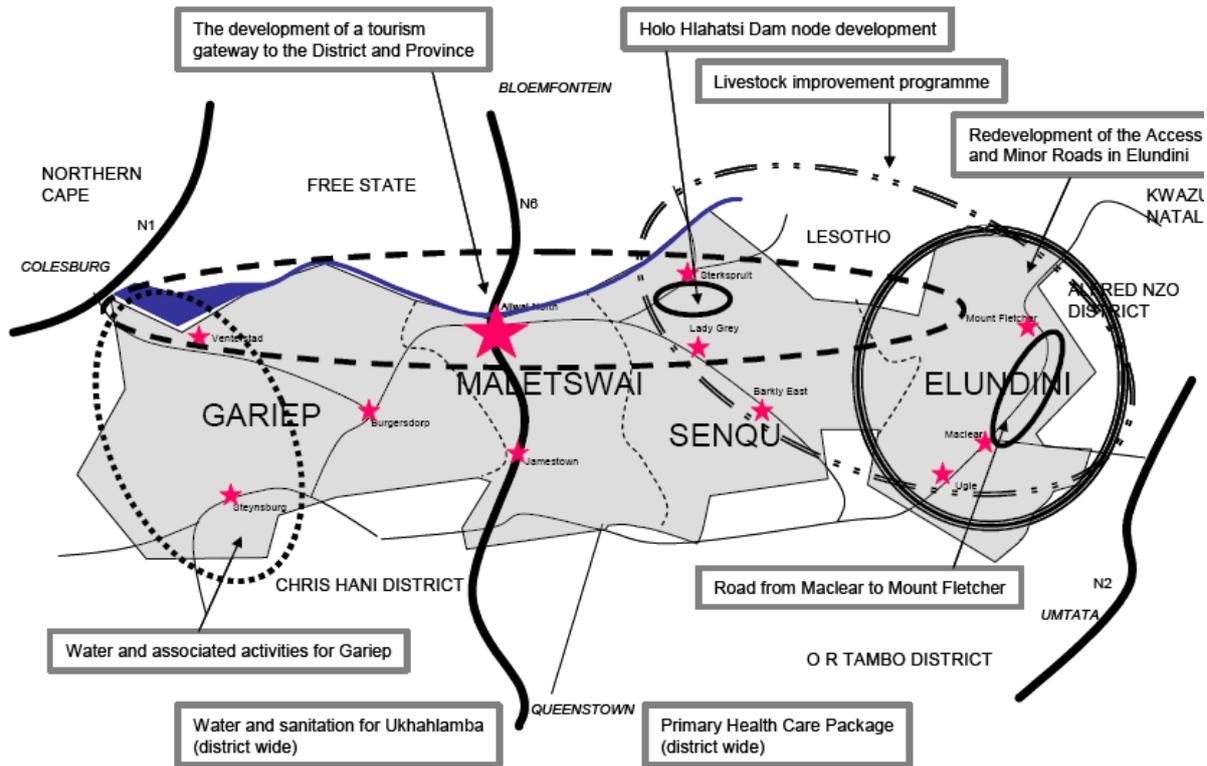
¹⁵ Gariep Local Municipality, *Integrated Development Plan*, 2002, pp. 14.

¹⁶ Gariep Local Municipality, *Integrated Development Plan*, 2002, pp. 23-45.

Gariep LM has appointed a Local Economic Development (LED) officer, and an Agricultural Development Officer, to promote economic development in the Gariep area.

3. Developmental priorities of the Ukhahlamba District Municipality

Oviston Nature Reserve is located in the extreme north-western corner of the Ukhahlamba District Municipality. The following map shows ONR in relation to the district economy:



Source: Ukhahlamba IDP, 2004.

Oviston Nature Reserve is identified as part of a sub-region, which will be focused on promoting “water and associated activities for Gariep”.

Ukhahlamba DM’s economic priorities include issues of interest to ONR:¹⁷

- Marketing of the district
- Bringing marginalised groups into the mainstream of the economy
- Diversification of the economy and broadening of the tax base
- Tourism as a focus area
- Labour-based programmes as a focus area

¹⁷ Ukhahlamba DM, *Integrated Development Plan*, 2004, p. 4.

- Fire fighting services, including planning, co-ordination, regulation, and training, and with mountain and veld fires noted as specific points of concern.¹⁸ This includes satellite office operation in each Local Municipality (such as Gariep LM), with provision of a fire fighting vehicle.

The Ukhahlamba District IDP envisages three items of expenditure which may affect ONR:

- (1) Lake !Gariep Development Programme (R2 232 million)
- (2) Jetty at Henties Bay (R400 000)
- (3) Tourism marketing of the Red River Route (R20 000).

C. Issues raised by stakeholders

Interviews were held with as many organised stakeholders as could be contacted. (A list of potential interviewees was supplied by the ONR management). These stakeholders included:

- Ukhahlamba District Municipality and Gariep Local Municipality, including officials (mainly concerned with Local Economic Development) and councillors
- Three commercial farmers associations, including a Conservancy and a Fire Protection Association
- Emergent farmers in Venterstad
- The Oviston/Venterstad community fishery
- Two angling clubs
- Four schools
- Neighbouring game reserves (Gariep NR and Tussen-die-Riviere NR)
- Oviston Ratepayers Association
- Community, Local and District Tourism Associations.

The interviews were held as unstructured discussions (i.e. no formal questionnaires were used), but the main purpose was to understand these groups' needs and interests, as far as the Nature Reserve was concerned, their previous experience with the ONR, and the issues which they would like to put on the agenda of a future Stakeholder Forum.

A total of 9 proper interviews were held. Telephone calls were made to an additional 16 stakeholders, asking them if they had specific issues to put on the agenda of the Stakeholder Forum.

The following is a list of issues which were raised by one or more of the stakeholders. In some cases, the stakeholders were not clear what the mandate of ONR would be, as regards key concerns. For the sake of completeness, these issues are included, even though some of these issues fall outside the strict definition of ONR's jurisdiction.

The following discussion includes a summary of the decisions taken at the Stakeholder Forum.

¹⁸ Ukhahlamba DM, *Integrated Development Plan*, 2004, p. 7.

1. Access control

There are daily visitors who enjoy the reserve for recreation – angling, cycling and walking. In the summer, about 50-60 people a day visit the reserve.

Currently, there is no access control. It is a voluntary system, based on filling in permits at the entrance. Many illiterate people (and other visitors) do not fill in the permits. It is not financially or logistically feasible to put in a full access control system. The system operates on trust.

There is a potential conflict regarding the desire of visitors to go outside the visitor areas, because the fishing is better there. This causes problems of control (due to the dispersed nature of the reserve), as well as the conflicting interests of hunters and fishers during the winter.

Key questions, for the future, are: Should an access fee be charged? What should be the level of fees? Should a differential system apply to local visitors (from Oviston/Venterstad) and to other tourists? Should a permanent guard be posted at the gate? Should there be only one gate, or more? Should they all be manned? What will be the management and financial implications of this?

ONR is virtually the only Eastern Cape reserve where there is no access control.

At the Forum, these questions elicited much discussion. A task team was appointed to examine the options.

2. Security issues

There are isolated cases of poaching near the towns. The locals set snares in the fenceline. The main animals caught in the snares are hares, reedbuck and steenbuck. Sometimes there is hunting with dogs.

When culprits are apprehended, they are prosecuted. This is not a growing problem.

It is a great advantage for ONR that one of its staff members is the deputy chair of the Venterstad Community Police Forum (CPF). This promotes collaboration between ONR and SAPS.

At the Forum, it was decided that the CPF is the correct forum to address future security issues in the Reserve.

3. Outsourcing

The need for training may also suggest ways in which the community may become involved, e.g. by outsourcing certain functions (such as catering or repairs). The Eastern Cape Parks Board has a new Commercialisation Division, which may encourage outsourcing in future.

At the Forum, participants were particularly concerned about the tendering process for culling. It was decided that the ONR would make the tendering requirements available for discussion on the Forum in future.

4. Fishing in the Gariep Dam

Strictly speaking, fishing in the Gariep Dam is not managed by ONR. The control of the water in the dam resides with DWAF, and the management of the fish resources is done by Free State Nature Conservation. Nevertheless, Oviston Nature Reserve is the main access point to the water, for Oviston and Venterstad residents. This means that ONR can play an important role in the design of the fishery policy.

Land based angling in the Gariep Dam falls directly under ONR. Boat based and commercial fishing falls under the control of the Free State.

In 2004, the Free State Department of Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism (DEAET) supported the Venterstad Community Fisheries Project, which aims to provide poverty relief to historically disadvantaged communities. An experimental fishing permit was issued by DEAET to allow the Fisheries to harvest an initial quota of 50 tons per year of three species of fish (common carp, the African sharptooth catfish, and the Orange River Labeo).¹⁹

Olaf Weyl has described the dilemmas of the current situation. Fisheries development can focus on three alternative sectors: Subsistence, commercial and recreational. Each of these addresses different developmental goals. Subsistence fisheries provide food for local residents, but will not lead to economic independence. Profit-oriented commercial fisheries would create economic independence to a limited number of participants, but would not maximise the local fish supply, as harvests are likely to be exported to better markets in urban areas. Recreational fishing would not maximise local food supply, but could promote employment by means of tourism accommodation, fishing day fees, tackle and bait shops. Consequently, hard choices need to be made. In the final Rhodes University report, the researchers argued that there is no inherent tension between subsistence and recreational fishing, but that commercial fishing could undermine the stocks of fish and threaten the other sectors.

Currently, South Africa lacks a clear guiding policy for the development of inland fisheries. Local municipalities have become the vehicles for promoting local economic development, and therefore have identified fisheries as a potential economic empowerment activity. However, evidence has shown that “the lack of local capacity in fisheries management has led to implementation processes that have ignored the finite nature of fisheries resources and the necessity of access limitation in the development of sustainable harvest strategies”²⁰

¹⁹ Olaf Weyl, application to NRF, 2006.

²⁰ Olaf Weyl, application to NRF, 2006.

A study by Olaf Weyl *et al* (2008) calculated that at least 400 local residents depend on fishing as a source of food.²¹ Many of these are poor people, dependent on social grants as their main source of income. From on a survey of households in the Venterstad/Oviston area, the authors concluded that 97% of households depend on fish as a vital source of food. The report also anticipated that the proposed community fishery is likely to impact severely on the availability of fish for these hook-and-line anglers. This option would benefit a few people, at the expense of the many. The report argued that angling is sustainable and is currently utilised below its potential. There is no conflict of interest between subsistence and recreational fishers.

Rhodes University has completed a study of the fishing potential of the Dam. A preliminary report argued that fishing stocks should not be depleted below 45% of the maximum biomass of fish.²² The authors argued that gillnets should not be used, because they target the vulnerable yellowfish and not the common carp. Seine nets are more likely to catch the common carp, but require a minimum mesh size of 100 mm to prevent catching juvenile fish. The problem with seine nets is that it is likely to compete with the hook and line fishery. In addition, seine nets are unlikely to be very profitable, due to the high costs of fuel of the boat, transport of the fish catch, and repair of the nets. The issue of netting remains controversial, because it could have a negative impact on the available fish, and because it may reduce the protected fish species in the dam.

The Oviston/Venterstad Community Fisheries was established a few years ago, but it subsequently collapsed. It has recently received another grant of R800 000 from the Department of Social Development. It now has only 15 members. Gariep LM played a role in the project by identifying the economic niche (fishing) and by identifying beneficiaries. The recent study by Rhodes University expressed doubt about the financial sustainability of this project. The project anticipates catching 50 tons of fish per annum, but it would also require transport, processing and marketing, and therefore it is unlikely that the participants in the project will reach a minimum wage income.²³ Proponents of the project claim that a canning company in Dordrecht is willing to purchase fish from the Community Fisheries, but the Fisheries lacks transport).

It is critically important that the financial sustainability of the Community Fisheries project be examined critically by an expert in small business management. There is the danger that the project is environmentally or financially unsustainable, and this would betray the trust of the members of the group.

The Vistonnel Angling Club has about 13 members. It is well organised, with regular meetings and events. The Vistonnel Club believes that the number of fish has declined. Netting may further reduce stocks of fish. There may be an implicit tension between the needs of the community fishery and the tourists who would like to do angling. The anglers also felt that the fishing licences do not specify the regulations for fishing clearly enough.

²¹ Olaf L.F. Weyl, Henning Winker, Bruce R. Ellender, Hermine Stelzhammer, and Anthony J. Booth, *Report on Fisheries Management Issues for the Oviston Nature Reserve*, Rhodes University, n.d.

²² W. Potts, O.L.F. Weyl, T.G. Andrew, *Final Report on an Initial Assessment of the Fisheries Potential of Gariep Dam*, Enviro-Fish Africa, Report prepared for the Department of Economic Affairs, Environment and Tourism, Eastern Cape, 2004.

²³ Olaf L.F. Weyl, Henning Winker, Bruce R. Ellender, Hermine Stelzhammer, and Anthony J. Booth, *Report on Fisheries Management Issues for the Oviston Nature Reserve*, Rhodes University, n.d.

Some black and coloured fishers are not organised. They fish on an individual basis, mainly for subsistence. In the past, they were organised as the Platdraad Hengelklub.

In 1988, a commercial fishing operator began activities near Bethulie. This company is still active. The presence of this company has raised concerns by local fishing operators that the local community is not benefiting from the fishing enterprise, and that it may make a local fishing enterprise unsustainable.

The issue of the level and nature of fishing access must still be resolved. It will be an important topic for the Forum. A coherent policy will need to be designed.

The question of fishing permits is likely to be a contested one. Community members in Venterstad are concerned that commercial farmers along the Lake have access to the water. The permit system would need to be explained to the Stakeholder Forum, and where necessary, adjusted.

At the Forum, it was decided that the fishing question needs much more discussion, particularly in the light of the Rhodes University reports.

5. Environmental awareness and problem plants

At the moment the ONR relies on voluntary compliance with its rules. However, this may be inadequate. One way of addressing the problem is to promote environmental awareness and an ethic of public trust.

There is no formal programme of environmental awareness raising. The schools may become a useful platform for educating the community about respect for the environment. At present, most school children in the area have virtually no experience of ONR.

The Small Farmers Association needs to become involved in the Stakeholder Forum, because of the problem of invasive plants (e.g. jointed cactus) spreading onto the Reserve.

At the Forum, there was strong support expressed for improved environmental awareness and education. One of the schools representatives undertook to discuss this matter with the neighbouring schools.

The Forum also decided that the problem of invasive species will be discussed at future meetings, in the light of the forthcoming subsidiary management plan on invasive alien plant species.

6. Game culling and sales

At present, game culling is put out to tender and applicants are commercial organizations that export venison to Europe. The ONR sells some of the culled game to local people. It has its own abattoir for processing the meat. The meat sells for about R13/kg. Clients are located mainly in Oviston, Venterstad, Bethulie and Gariiep Dam. The idea of “benefiting the locals” is not an official policy, but it is implicitly adhered to.

Visitors to the park have expressed the concern that there is too little game due to too much culling. The animals become people-shy, and this detracts from tourism.

At the Forum meeting, there were strong concerns expressed about the tendering process for the culling of game. Local residents believed that they should be allowed to tender; but the difficulty is that the tender is issued by the Eastern Cape Parks Board (not by the ONR), and that conditions are very stringent, in order to comply with European Union regulations.

7. Small business: Crafts and agriculture

ONR has been approached by the Department of Social Development in Venterstad, to allow a community project. The project wants to obtain skins for tanning. They also require ostrich feathers and ostrich eggs.

There are plans for agri-tourism in Gariiep LM. It is apparently spearheaded by Mr Visser, the acting Director of Corporate Services in the Gariiep LM. A report has been drafted by ATS Consultants in Queenstown. The plan includes an irrigation scheme. But permits for using water will have to be acquired from DWAF. The Dordrecht canning company would also be available for canning vegetables.

8. Promoting tourism

In about 2001, an amount of R2,8 million was granted by the Department of Economic Development, for several projects:

- A houseboat, to provide off-shore accommodation to tourists
- A cultural centre in Venterstad
- Refurbishing of the Caravan Park in Oviston
- Establishing a Community fisheries.

Of these projects, the Caravan Park has shown significant progress. The houseboat project is currently caught up in a legal dispute between the municipality and the builder of the houseboats. The cultural centre is in disuse, but may be revived for another purpose (tourism or agriculture). The community fisheries project collapsed, but is being revived.

The heritage resources of the ONR could be developed and marketed more effectively.

A Tourism Sector Plan is being drafted by the Gariiep Local Municipality. James Cary is on the Project Steering Committee, which enables the interests and benefits of the ONR to be included directly into the Plan. However, more money needs to be invested in ONR's tourism potential. The possibility of hiking trails should be considered, and the facilities at the viewing sites need to be improved.

Some interviewees felt that an Info Centre is required in Oviston, possibly near the entrance to the town. A possible facility could be the ONR offices. This would require a staff member who would collect tourism information and liaise with tourists. He/she could be an employee of either ONR or the municipality – depending on funding available.

AIMS is planning to add two more chalets and a swimming pool to the Lake Xhariep Resort. This may also be a venue for the crafts centre. This would strengthen the tourism potential of ONR. Some interviewees felt that the Houseboat initiative needs to be revived, as an adjunct to the Lake !Xhariep Resort.

Additional tourism facilities are required. The Municipality has apparently requested funding from the Department of Sports and Recreation to renovate the Olympic-size swimming pool in Oviston. This will serve tourists as well as the local community.

The concept of the Lake !Gariiep Festival is being investigated. This will include horse-riding, 4x4 drives, motorbikes, hiking trails, a music festival, arts and crafts, and a soccer tournament (Venterstad). It will include events at Teebus near Steynsburg.

At the Forum meeting, it was decided that the local tourism bodies are vigorous enough to take the matter forward, without a new task team being created.

A major step forward is the TriDistrict Alliance, to promote co-operation between Ukhahlamba DM (Eastern Cape), Xhariep DM (Free State) and Pixley ka Seme DM (Northern Cape).

The TriDistrict Alliance is planning combined projects, such as signage. Its current strategy includes the following projects:

- A management plan for Vanderkloof Resort
- Upgrading of the Gariiep resort
- Promoting route signage
- Promoting information and marketing of Lake !Gariiep, including the creation of an Info Centre
- Promoting the Tourism Info Centre in Bethulie, and
- The Oviston Nature Reserve Management Plan.

The TriDistrict Alliance is being funded by DEAT – first by means of an amount of R2,9 million, and then another R5,8 million. A Project Advisory Committee has been established with participation from six municipalities and their associated tourism structures.

9. Fire protection

Two Farmers Associations in the vicinity have a reciprocal arrangement with ONR, to undertake fire protection. There was some discussion as to whether fire protection was better achieved by fire breaks which are impractical because of the shape and length (80 km) of the boundary fence, or by block burns.

At present, fire-fighting is a component of Disaster Management, which is a District Municipal function. However, this function has apparently been delegated to the Local Municipality, on an agency basis. The DM has to take the lead in designing a policy on disaster management – and apparently, this policy has not yet been forthcoming.

Consequently, there has not yet been investment in Gariep LM's capacity (in terms of staff and equipment) to undertake fire-fighting.

In this institutional vacuum, the ONR has to do its own fire-fighting, often with the support of commercial farmers. This is a very unsatisfactory situation, because – in effect – ONR becomes responsible for fire-fighting in areas outside its jurisdiction (such as Oviston town). No support from Gariep LM has been forthcoming. The issue of fire protection elicited vigorous debate at the Forum meeting, because many participants were critical of the lack of leadership of the Ukhahlamba DM, the urgent need for fire-fighting capacity to be provided within Gariep LM, and more specifically, the need for fire-fighting capacity within Venterstad and Oviston.

It was decided, at the Forum, that the Ukhahlamba DM and Gariep LM will report back to the next meeting of the Forum, about progress made in this regard.

10. Problem animals

The ONR has representation on the Farmers Associations' meetings. The issue of problem animals has been repeatedly discussed. Where necessary, the ONR has undertaken to eliminate specific problem animals.

At the Forum meeting, it became clear that the commercial farmers are very frustrated with the large number of "problem animals" emanating from ONR, and that it made sheep farming almost unviable.

The Forum decided that a task team, consisting of ONR, commercial farmers and emergent farmers, be created to address this issue.

12. Wood collection and birdlife

Wood is being collected informally from the Oviston Nature Reserve by the Oviston and Venterstad communities.

The ONR strongly supports harvesting of alien bluegum trees. Working for Water should become involved and to clear the gums faster and more efficiently.

But additional (indigenous) trees should perhaps be planted to encourage birdlife – especially for birds (raptors) currently nesting in the bluegum trees. Some stakeholders questioned whether it is really necessary to remove the bluegums.

At the Forum, it was felt that the bluegums are multiplying rapidly, and this needs to be curtailed. The remaining bluegums can be killed by ringbarking so that the standing dead trees would still provide perches for bird species such as fish eagles.

A Councillor of Gariep LM undertook to take the issue of firewood harvesting forward, and in particular, to explore the possibility of a woodlot.

D. The Stakeholder Forum

The launch of the Stakeholder Forum was held on 21 May 2008, in Oviston. It was facilitated by Prof Doreen Atkinson.

Attendance list

ORGANISATION	Name	Tel	E-mail
1. Oviston Nature Reserve	James Cary	(051) 655 0000	james@ecparks.co.za
2. DEDEA	Tim de Jongh	082 461 4087	Tbone.deJongh@DEAET.ECAPE.gov.za
3. Ukhahlamba DM	Pumeza Tanga	045 979 3096	tourism@ukhahlamba.gov.za
4. Gariiep Local Municipality: Councillor (Ward)	EM Thomas	082 453 9502	Fax: (051) 654 0344
5. Gariiep Local Municipality: Councillor (PR)	Annette Steyn	082 323 0027	anett@xsinet.co.za
6. Gariiep Local Municipality: LED Officer	Wiseman Nodwele	(051) 658 0639	wise4tour@webmail.co.za
7. Oviston Primary School	Neville Lesshope	(051) 655 0039	
8. Kareefontein Primary School, Lyciumville			
9. Kayamnandi Primary School, Nozizwe	P.P. Nkomana	073 226 7817	patnkomana@telkomsa.net54rrrrrr
10. Simphiwe Kethwa High School. Venterstad			
11. Community Tourism Organisation	H Carey	(051) 655 0059	oviston@vodamail.co.za
12. Local Tourism Organisation	H Carey	(051) 655 0059	oviston@vodamail.co.za
13. District Tourism Organisation	H Carey	(051) 655 0059	oviston@vodamail.co.za
14. Venterstad/Oviston Community Fisheries	M Nongaphi	084 730 7133	
15. SAPS Venterstad	Capt M Nel	082 925 2905 082 413 5519 (051) 654 0091	Fax: (051) 654 0237

16. Oviston Ratepayers	Mr Vorhan		
17. Platdraad Hengelklub	David Wilson	074 223 8945	
18. Hennie Steyn Hengelklub			
19. Vistonnel Hengelklub	Harry Nowers		
20. Venterstad Farmers Association	Meyer van der Walt	072 529 5803	Fax (051) 654 0650 (654 0550?)
21. Knapdaar Farmers Association	Mr K Field		
22. Bethulie SAPS Hengelklub	Mr Piet Pretorius		
24. Venterstad Farmers Association	Mr W Noyo		
25. Venterstad Small Farmers / Kleinboere	M Moloinyana	076 980 1006	
26. Venterstad Fire Protection Association	L Lumkile	073 992 5443	
27. Bo-Oranje Conservancy	Robbie Hughes		
28. Tussen-die-Riviere Natuureservaat	Apologies		
29. Gariep Natuureservaat	Harry Bosman		
30. AIMS Research team	Sue Milton Richard Dean	(023) 541 1828	
Other members			
31.	Paul Mokoena	(051) 654 1457	
32. Department of Water Affairs	A.S. Dippenaar	(051) 754 0001	
33. Department of Water Affairs	HPP Murphy	(051) 754 0001	
34. T.C. Abraham		051 – 750 0926	
35. JB Haasbroek		072 226 3227	

36. Gariep LM	Lwanga Gqetwa	(01) 653 0639	
37. Eastern Cape Tourism Board	Nomhla Yakopi	(043) 701 9600	
38. EC Parks Board	Sifisio Khoza	(051) 655 0000	

There was a total of approximately 42 participants.

Forum Proceedings:

1. Welcome by James Cary:
 - 1.1 The Eastern Cape Parks Board manages all the provincial parks in the Eastern Cape. The strategic plan for ONR was developed in 2006, and its strategic goals include: reserve planning and expansion, biodiversity and heritage resources, stakeholder involvement, visitor facilities and services, administration, and knowledge management.
 - 1.2 One of the main focuses of the ECPB is to make reserves relevant to communities. That is why we are here – to establish a forum that will assist in reserve management.
2. Doreen Atkinson welcomed everyone – she was pleased to see such a large number of participants (approx 42). She asked people to introduce themselves (see attendance list). The participants included: Biodiversity conservation, tour guides, angling, Department of Water Affairs, Gariep Local Municipality, Oviston angling club, Bo-Oranje conservancy, farmers associations, Gariep Nature Reserve, Venterstad Farmers Association, SAPS from Venterstad, local tourism, chair of the Ratepayers Association, emergent farmers from Venterstad, Knapdaar Farmers Association, Venterstad Primary School, the Dept of Sports, Arts and Culture, the Venterstad Primary School, Community fishing project, UTGA, the Eastern Cape Tourism Board, and community representatives. Apologies were received from Tussen-die-Riviere Nature Reserve.
3. Language of meeting: English and Afrikaans
4. Management system:
 - 4.1 ONR is accountable to Eastern Cape Parks Board. The ONR borders Gariep & Tussen-die-Riviere Nature Reserves. The water in the dam is managed by the Free State Government. There are agreements in place with farmers about the access and use of ONR. ONR is part of Gariep & Ukhahlamba municipalities, and is included in their IPDs and tourism strategies. ONR is involved in Lake !Gariiep development negotiations. The recreational use of water, and commercial fishing, is regulated by the Free State government. Water use is

regulated via DWAF. Access to the water on the Eastern Cape side is managed by ONR.

- 4.2 This Stakeholder Forum is part of the ONR management plan to ensure that ONR has clear management objectives in the medium term.
 - 4.3 EC Parks Board has key result areas: (1) Partnership with all local stakeholders to avoid conflicts, protect resources, address mutual quality of life interests and provide visitor enjoyment, (2) Integrate reserve management activities into local development plans, (3) Empower staff and other stakeholders to enjoy economic opportunities related to the Reserve, (4) Ensure that stakeholders have managed access to the reserve on an equitable basis, and (5) Achieve a balance between ecological sustainability, economic efficiency and social equity.
5. The participants then held an Exercise, to discuss the elements of the partnership. Each participant was asked to write down answers to two questions: (1) what do I want from the ONR, and (2) what contribution can I make to ONR?
 6. Substantive inputs for ONR: These topics were based on interviews conducted by Doreen Atkinson:

6.1 *Access to reserve*

- There are 46 access gates, with a boundary fence of 250km. At present it is a voluntary system, with no access control. There are up to 60 visitors per day - walking, angling, and cycling. They are meant to fill in own permit – but most people do not do this.
- This self permitting system is not working because some of the boxes for the self-written permits are broken, and many of the local visitors are illiterate and do not fill in permits.
- Participants felt that there should be better access control – for example, people hunt with their dogs in the reserve (6 people agreed with this).
- More than one access point will be needed, and could possibly have gate guards.
- Farmer access is already under agreement – but people from Oviston, Venterstad and elsewhere should need permits.
- People should sign annually that they agree to their permit conditions.
- Will permits be free? Visitors to Gariiep Nature Reserve can buy an annual permit costing R350/yr. Cary – there are approved day tariffs in other Eastern Cape Parks (R5/day).
- There is only one access gate at Gariiep Nature Reserve.
- There could possibly be different types of permits – locals and non-local.
- There should be some completely open free areas for subsistence fishing, other areas should be closed and require a permit.
- Volunteers to develop access plan (Local tourism- Helen Cary, Bethulie SAPS Ope Hengelklub – Piet Pretorius, Tokkie Abrahams,

Gariep Municipality – tourism/LED, farmers association – Meyer van der Walt, Community Fisheries, Tour guides – Nataniel Lesshope, Vistonnel Hengelklub – Harry Nowers)

6.2 *Security*

- Issues are: Poaching, dog hunting, tourism safety.
- There is no police in Oviston, although there are plans for satellite police station in Oviston (Community Police Forum).
- Security issues will be discussed in future under the auspices of the CPF.

6.3 *Fire protection*

- There are reciprocal arrangements with two fire protection associations (Knapdaar and Venterstad)
- Emergent farmers – no arrangement with ONR – this needs to be addressed.
- There are contentious issues – Knapdaar Fire Protection Association asked DWAF to allow burn block fires rather than burning fire breaks. As yet no feedback. This needs to be resolved.
- ONR gets called to put out fires in private houses and Municipal commonage using ONR equipment and staff. This is because of a lack of effective fire fighting by Gariep Local Municipality.
- Ukhahlamba District Municipality is responsible for Disaster Management, but there does not appear to be a concrete plan for fire-fighting. There is also a lack of equipment and training.
- Municipality says they have a plan in the IDP – but Oviston rate payers deny this. Municipality says that this matter was raised in the IDP Forum. R86,000 has been set aside for Disaster Management, but it is not clear what this will be spent on. The Municipality does not have adequate equipment and staff. Police also need to contribute to disaster plans. Co-ordination between these stakeholders is needed.
- Oviston Nature Reserve could help to co-ordinate people to attend meetings on disaster management, as it relates to the Reserve.
- James Cary should request the Municipality (write a letter) to ask the District to organise meeting of role players to develop fire fighting plan and co-ordinate stakeholders.

6.4 *Problem plants*

- Eucalyptus – some stakeholders do not want the trees cut because the landscape will look treeless, and it may affect birdlife
- Large nesting trees could possibly be ring barked and left standing
- Cactus on commonage – ONR needs to co-operate with the Gariep LM agricultural officer to solve this
- Cockleburrs (*Xanthium* spp.) are spreading from reserve to farms
- Copies of final alien vegetation management report (prepared for AIMS by Prof Sue Milton and Dr. Richard Dean) should be made available to the Forum.

6.5 *Problem animals*

- There is already an agreement between ONR and the farmers to control animals such as jackal.
- This agreement has not yet been formalised but has existed since 1994.
- Small farmers have no informal agreement with ONR.
- The reserve needs to formalise the written agreement with the commercial and small farmers.
- Steenbok from nature reserve (they are not actually from the reserve but reside in the municipal area of Oviston) are eating vegetables in people's gardens in Oviston – but if they are chased by dogs, the NR shoots dogs. This matter needs to be addressed.
- The three stakeholders (ONR, commercial farmers and emergent farmers) should meet to formalise the agreement and outcome made in writing.
- Poor fencing on the commonage boundary – domestic animals stray into the Reserve.

6.6 *Fuelwood*

- People are allowed to harvest bluegums, and to collect indigenous dead wood – but they sometimes take the wrong trees. Some people cut down trees, and collect the wood once it is dry.
- Education needed through schools, churches
- People need woodlots – but woodlots did not work.
- Ms Annette Steyn promised to take the matter regarding woodlots forward.
- Prof. Sue Milton suggested growing indigenous soetdoring (*Acacia karroo*) in woodlots if this wood was acceptable to users.

6.7 *Game culling*

- Some participants felt that the meat is too expensive. It should be made available at more affordable prices.
- Some participants felt that they were being excluded from work opportunities associated with game culling and felt that the tendering process was not transparent.

6.8 *Fishing*

Doreen Atkinson gave a Powerpoint presentation about the key findings of the Rhodes University study.

- More than 400 people from the villages use fish they catch from the dam – mainly carp. There are no differences in catches from open and closed access areas. Angling is sustainable. There is no conflict between recreational and subsistence sectors.
- Gill nets target yellowfish and compete with anglers. The Commercial fishery may undermine subsistence fishery. The commercial fishery is probably not financially viable because of fuel and other overheads. The participants will have to achieve a minimum wage, and they will need to catch 50 tons/year. There are enough carp – but fishery needs to be selective. The problem with

gill nets is that it may reduce the yellowfish population – and this is a protected species.

- Types of permits. Free State Government consults with ONR to approve permits for netting areas.
- There is already a relationship between ONR and the fisheries and Gariep Nature Reserve who are responsible for approving the issuing of permits from Free State conservation.
- The stakeholders should study the report together.

6.9 *Farming – irrigation for small farmers*

- The application for a permit to draw water must go to DWAF.
- Farmers on municipal land have written letter to DWAF to ask for water. There have been extensive delays in getting a response from DWAF.
- This item should serve on the future agendas, and DWAF should report back on what can be done about water provision to small farmers.

6.10 *Cemetery in Oviston*

- There is no cemetery for Oviston. Is there land in ONR for a cemetery?
- ONR is a declared Nature Reserve – and cannot be subdivided
- There is probably enough municipal land for a cemetery. The municipal delegates undertook to investigate the availability of suitable land for a cemetery.

6.11 *Environmental Education*

- There is not much use of the reserve by schools – there is a school tour once annually.
- The schools should be encouraged to integrate environmental awareness. There is a need for life science, life orientation, and conservation in curriculum. There needs to be better link between the Education Sector and ONR to link environmental education with the curriculum.
- An Environmental Officer should be appointed to ONR to do environmental education. Apparently the Department of Economic Development and Environmental Affairs have recently appointed such officials.
- Educators need to bring learners to the reserve and make use of the facility. Environmental officers have recently been appointed to this region.
- Mr Nkomana of the Kayamnandi Primary School in Venterstad undertook to bring this matter to the attention of his colleagues at the other schools.
- The reserves main function is Biodiversity conservation, and not necessarily environmental conservation. Schools are more than welcome to visit the reserve on their own as well.

6.12 *Tourism*

- There are many tourism opportunities in ONR: The caravan park, marketing of heritage, info centre oviston, hiking, view sites, boating, houseboats, community crafts, tri-district festival, agritourism.
- ONR is already participating in the Tri-District Alliance (Lake !Gariiep initiative).
- This matter will be dealt with by the Community Tourism Organisation, the Local Tourism Organisation and the District Tourism Organisation.

6.13 *Outsourcing of services*

- Can some of the ONR functions be outsourced?
- There was a long discussion about the outsourcing of animal culling to outside companies. James Cary explained that people conducting the culling must be TB tested and trained for the export of venison, registered with veterinary services. It is all EU regulated. The tender specifications are not drafted by ONR, but by the Eastern Cape Parks Board.
- Locals also wanted to be employed during these culling operations.
- How else can local people be brought into the process to keep money in local area? It was decided that the tender requirements will be discussed at future meetings of the forum, so that all stakeholders know what these requirements are. Transparency about the regulations is needed, to give locals an opportunity to tender.
- How do local people benefit from culling? People do receive some meat from culling via churches and other institutions.

7. Exercise – Participants added more ideas to their exercise sheets, and the forms were handed in.

8. *Future structure of the forum*

- Who can join forum – individuals or organizations? It was felt that it should be limited to organisations. However, the Forum could ask specific individuals to participate, if they can make a meaningful contribution.
- The feeling is that individuals with a shared interest should form a club – and then join as a member of a club.
- ONR will convene meetings and chair the meetings.
- Secretariat will be based within ONR.
- Outside facilitator to be brought in as required.
- Three meetings will be held per year.
- Task teams will be established for specific issues.

9. *Functions of the Forum*

The meeting assented to suggestions made by Doreen Atkinson:

- Express local interests
- Conflict resolution
- Information dissemination, awareness and understanding
- Mobilizing resources and support

- Assisting implementation and enforcement of regulations
- The Forum can undertake specific developmental activities
- The minutes of this meeting would be distributed by ONR.

10. *Next meeting:* In three months' time.

11. Closure by James Cary: Thanked all stakeholders and hopes that ONR receives support in future. Thanked Doreen for facilitating the workshop.

E. The results of the participatory exercise

Note: Some comments are duplicated by different people; these duplications are retained, as it shows the balance of opinions regarding different issues

Question 1: How can I benefit from the ONR?

- (1) Fishing organisations:
 - Would like to get permits for fishing
 - We would like better access to the reserve
 - We would like the reserve to be neat
 - We would like access to fishing sites which are currently only provided to other people
- (2) Tourism organisations:
 - Economic promotion of the nature reserve
 - ONR improves the district and the province, as a tourism destination
 - Better tourism opportunities
 - Better balance of animals on the reserve
 - I would like to start my own tour guiding business
- (3) Policing:
 - Protection of animals and plants for the future.
- (4) Municipality
 - Job creation for the community
 - Promote the economy of the town, municipality and province
 - I can participate in managing and assisting in tourism development
- (5) Small farmers association:
 - Need water to irrigate crops
 - Need a piece of land for livestock
 - Obtain information about nature reserve (the different animals)
- (6) Neighbouring nature reserve:
 - Protection of biodiversity
- (7) Schools:

- The Reserve can assist our school with studies of life science, particularly ecosystem and nature conservation
- (8) Government department
- Fishing
 - Relaxation
 - Catching game
 - Obtaining meat from game.

Question 2: How can I contribute to the ONR?

- (1) Fishing organisations:
- We can help nature by looking after the animals and plants
 - We can keep the angling site neat and clean
 - We can follow the rules of the nature reserve
 - Ensure that plant life and nature are preserved
 - Would like to tender for certain tasks: fencing, repair of roads and stock counting
- (2) Tourism organisations
- Marketing of ONR
 - Can help to market the Reserve as a preferred destination
 - Ensure that there is proper signage
 - Assist community to identify small business opportunities, as part of LED
 - Spread the word of tourism
 - Report any problems on the reserve to Reserve officials
 - I could help to teach the community about the importance of animals and plants
- (3) Policing:
- Protection of animals and plants by ensuring that criminals do not harm nature.
- (4) Municipality:
- Protect and preserve nature.
 - Make children aware of the importance of nature conservation
 - I can guide tourists and give the background of the town
- (5) Small farmers Association:
- Contribute to the fees of the nature reserve
 - Take care of the land so that the fences will not be vandalised
 - Would like to be involved in
 - Promote tourism
 - Protection of animals – not hunting of animals
- (6) Neighbouring nature reserve
- Co-operation between nature reserves

- Sharing information and research
- (7) School:
- I could help with educational presentations and facilitation, at school and community levels.
- (8) Government department:
- Keep the nature reserve neat
 - Don't make fires or cut down wood
 - Don't put out traps for animals.