



**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CONSERVANCIES OF
SOUTH AFRICA
(NACSA)**

POLICY DOCUMENT

AGRICULTURE

NOVEMBER 2005

BACKGROUND TO THIS DOCUMENT

It was decided at a sitting of NACSA, in May 2004 at Itala Game Reserve in Kwa Zulu Natal, to create a policy document, which would acknowledge NACSA's stance on the **agricultural sector**. The first draft was presented to a follow up sitting of NACSA at Willem Pretorius Nature Reserve, Free State, in November 2004. A resolution regarding the document was deferred by the, then, chairman of the sitting. No Reasons were cited. The issue of this document was again tabled on the agenda of the following sitting of NACSA, held at Sudwalakraal, Mpumalanga in May 2005, however, due to not everybody having a copy of the document to enable proper discussion thereof, it was resolved that the document would be circulated electronically to all committee members prior to the November 2005 sitting of the committee for final comment prior to a resolution being sought on the subject at the above mentioned sitting.

In June 2005, the author of this document re-circulated a copy electronically, requesting feedback, discussion, and criticism thereof to enable the compilation of a follow-up draft for tabling at the November 2005 sitting at Willem Pretorius Nature Reserve, Free State. Two comments were received prior to the closing date for comment.

On the 17th November 2005, during a sitting of the NACSA committee at Willem Pretorius Nature Reserve, Free State, this document was accepted and ratified, subject to three corrections. The following is the document *mutates mutandis*.

INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector uses approximately 80% of South Africa's 120 million hectare land surface, incorporating some of our country's most sensitive ecosystems.

Many of our country's farmers are indeed good land conservationists, unfortunately with ever increasing financial, resource and manpower burdens placed at the foot of our agricultural industry, many farmers are forced to ensure that every portion of their land becomes financially productive. This can negatively impact on our biophysical environment. It is with this in mind that NACSA strives to create a communicative platform where the respective interests of nature conservation and agriculture can find common ground and progress in a meaningful partnership.

It is acknowledged that, historically, these two disciplines have been polarized. This, however, is changing through the realization that co-operative land management holds benefits for all land users.

NACSA therefore believes it can fulfill a vital role in supporting and assisting the agricultural industry with respect to best land management practices and, in turn, there is a wealth of stored knowledge which can be gained from farmers which can be of great importance to those working in the field of nature conservation.

This policy document is therefore intended as a framework in which to aid NACSA and individual conservancies who interface with the agricultural sector, as many of our conservancy

members do. This document does not attempt to develop detailed sectoral policies, for example on problem animal control or methods of controlling alien invasive plants, but rather, it strives to create an holistic, corporate viewpoint, within which more detailed polices and strategies can be developed. Thus, this policy document should be neither static nor binding, and should be one that meets the challenge of changing perspectives and environmental legislation, and should be malleable enough to encompass new and more dynamic viewpoints.

LEGISLATION

All agricultural activities undertaken must be executed in accordance with the laws of South Africa.

Section 24 of the **National Constitution of South Africa's Bill of Rights** states:

Environment

24. Everyone has the right –

- a) to an environment that is not harmful to their health or well being; and
- b) to have the environment protected, for the benefit of present and future generations, through reasonable legislative and other measures that –
 - i) prevent pollution and ecological degradation
 - ii) promote conservation; and
 - iii) secure ecologically sustainable development and use of natural resources while promoting justifiable economic and social development.

There is a plethora of legislation that will, to a greater or lesser degree effect the agricultural industry and it is beyond the scope of this document to include a comprehensive listing of these or related legislation such as that governing labour or fiscal matters. However, the following are of relevance to the conservation of resources.

- 1 National Environmental Management Act 107 of 1998 (NEMA)
- 2 National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004 (NEMBA)
- 3 National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003
- 4 Environment Conservation Act 73 of 1989
- 5 Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act 43 of 1983 (CARA)
- 6 National Water Act 36 of 1998
- 7 Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act 28 of 2002
- 8 Fertilizers, Farm Feeds, Agricultural Remedies and Stock Remedies Act 36 of 1947
- 9 National Forests Act 84 of 1998
- 10 The various provincial nature conservation ordinances.

NACSA reserves the right to enter into meaningful dialogue with any government department who proposes laws concerning the agricultural industry, which may directly or indirectly have a deleterious effect on the environment.

STEWARDSHIP

All land owners and tenants have a moral obligation towards upholding proper land stewardship principles of sustainable resource usage.

NACSA supports the principals of formal stewardship programs as tabled by the various provincial nature conservation agencies, and are committed to entering into negotiations whereby equitable policies are tabled that afford land owners the opportunity to manage biodiversity upon their land in a manner that does not financially or resourcefully dissuade such activities.

SUSTAINABLE LAND USE PLANNING

NACSA supports the practice of proper land use planning which is environmentally and economically sustainable. This includes:

- 1 Low-yield, marginal lands should not be used for crop production. Suitable alternatives such as game, commercial live stock or agri/eco-tourism should be considered.
- 2 Sustainable portions of land should be set aside for “ green corridors “, which maintain genetic diversity and allow for the free movement of wildlife.
- 3 Co-operative management of “ green corridors “ across land ownership boundaries should be encouraged.
- 4 Encroachment of urban development into prime agricultural areas should be avoided.

SOIL CONSERVATION

NACSA supports responsible and sustainable soil conservation practices through proper land husbandry. This includes:

- 1 Only by prior written authority, can virgin soil be cultivated.
- 2 Top soil must be protected against wind and water erosion, especially when vegetative coverage is sparse or non-existent (for example during tillage).
- 3 Except on authority of written permission, land with a slope of more than 12% should not be cultivated.
- 4 Irrigated land must be protected against water logging and salination through responsible land use practices and the proper rotation of land use.
- 5 Cultivation of slopes must be executed using proper contouring and correct drainage.
- 6 Roads, shed's and dwellings must be equipped with proper storm water management systems.
- 7 Any oils, fuels, pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers should be handled in such a way as not to pollute the soil or soil water resources.
- 8 Soil that is degraded and eroded should be properly rehabilitated.

WATER

NACSA encourages responsible and wise water usage and is opposed to any agricultural practice

that degrades both surface and subterranean water quality and quantity. This may be achieved by:

- 1 Protecting catchment systems from the encroachment of invasive alien plant species and halting and managing the spread of soil erosion.
- 2 Protecting indigenous ecosystems along water courses.
- 3 Guarding against excessive run-off of agricultural chemicals into water courses through proper land management practices.
- 4 Creating appropriate buffer zones around wetlands and water courses.
- 5 Refraining from any form of wetland disturbance, for example cultivation of wetlands, building of roads or any other infrastructure across wetland systems.
- 6 Guarding against the release of any exotic aquatic organism (both animal or vegetable) into any aquatic environment.
- 7 Ensuring all waterways, dams etc. are kept free of invasive aquatic weeds.
- 8 Ensuring that all aquicultural practices (whether fresh water or marine) are properly authorized in terms of the National Environmental management Act (No. 107 of 1998), as amended. Such activities are to be planned and executed in such a manner as to greatly reduce or nullify any potential physical or chemical impact to the environment, caused by habitat disturbance or the increase of nutrients into the aquatic system.

BOTANICAL RESOURCES

Contrary to popular belief, some of our most sensitive and threatened ecosystems are not to be found exclusively in our country's game/nature reserves, but on privately owned land. Due to organized agriculture being the largest landowner in South Africa, it is vitally important that farmers become aware that they have a pivotal part to play in the protection of our country's botanical resources.

Farmers and nature conservationists need to co-operate in ensuring that botanical knowledge is developed outside of formally protected areas. This can be achieved by:

- 1 Encouraging farmers to become better informed about the plant life and veld types occurring on their farms. Should this knowledge be lacking on the part of the farmer, local nature conservation officials or local plant experts can be consulted for information or guidance. This is one of the many areas in which local conservancies can also be of assistance.
- 2 Actively encouraging nature conservation and botanical students to focus their areas of study more on privately owned land rather than in the customary formally protected areas. There is still a great lack of knowledge of plant distributions outside of protected areas.
- 3 Any rare, endangered or new species of plant found on farms should be reported to the provincial nature conservation agency so that it can be captured and added to existing biodiversity data on the area. Strategies may be discussed with the agency or organizations such as the local conservancy, Botanical Society etc, regarding the protection and conservation of rare or endangered specimens or populations. The fact that a botanical reference guide may not list a specific species as occurring in a particular area does not necessarily mean that it does not occur, rather that it may never have previously been noted and catalogued from that specific area. All such information is, thus, vital to botanical research and biodiversity conservation. Actively discourage the practice of indiscriminate wild plant harvesting by landscapers, florists, rare plant collectors, and

“muthi plant” collectors. Those found collecting plants illegally on farmland should be criminally charged under the provincial nature conservation ordinance or National Forest Act.

- 4 Any harvesting of seed of specially protected or rare indigenous plants must be in accordance with the provincial nature conservation ordinance and care must be taken by those harvesting, not to sterilize the entire plant population in an area.
- 5 Any bioprospecting by organizations must be in accordance with the terms of those found within the National Environmental Management: biodiversity Act Farmers and land tenants are urged to ensure that such activities are accompanied by the proper documented official authorization to engage in such activities. and to ensure that such activities are executed in such a manner as not to adversely effect the resource.
- 6 NACSA endorses the entering into consultation with user groups (eg landscapers, iNyang’s etc) to find amicable ways of sustainable and legal resource usage. Should this fail, then the rule of law must be used to ensure compliance with statutes regarding the harvesting of protected flora.
- 7 Invasive alien plant species must be eradicated or managed in such a way that the spread of populations does not invade areas of indigenous habitat or neighbouring properties.

WILDLIFE AND HUNTING

All naturally occurring wildlife on farms should be conserved and properly managed by:

- 1 Ensuring that sufficient natural habitat exists to sustain the passage of wild populations of fauna.
- 2 Ensuring against the destruction of habitat harboring rare or endangered species.
- 3 Educating farm labour as to the benefits of wildlife occurring n the farm and the legalities of chasing, hunting or capturing them.
- 4 Starting up a conservancy in the district, which would aim at establishing co-operative management of transient wildlife population in the area.
- 5 Reporting any unusual sightings or the occurrence of rare or endangered species to the local representative of the provincial nature conservation agency, for inclusion onto their data- base.
- 6 Adhering to all laws pertaining to the protection of wildlife.
- 7 Ensure that all hunting on farms is in accordance with the provincial nature conservation legislation.
- 8 Ensuring against unethical forms of hunting or any inhumane treatment of wildlife.
- 9 Refraining from importing any exotic species onto farms and game farms, including any indigenous species that do not naturally occur in the region.
- 10 Guarding against any illegal hunting o agricultural land.
- 11 Stocking farms or game farms with the correct species composition so as to guard against any unnatural hybridizing occurring.
- 12 Refraining from purchasing and stocking farms with any hybrid game species.
- 13 Refraining from selecting aberrant forms of wildlife for breeding purposes. (eg melinistic or albino forms)

HUNTING WITH DOGS

Unless provided for in terms of provincial nature conservation ordinances, the use of dogs to hunt down wildlife (excluding dogs that aid in bona fide hunts, such as those used for retrieval or the flushing of wild fowl) is illegal and the perpetrators should be charged criminally in accordance with the rule of law.

Whilst it is every property owners right to destroy any dog or any other domestic animal in pursuit of wildlife, property owners or tenants should do so with discretion. Dogs should not be destroyed if handlers are present. Handlers may be charged for trespassing if found on private land without prior authority of the landowner, or, if sufficient evidence exists that the handler was hunting illegally, then the dogs may be removed and contained pending the outcome of a formal charge under the provincial nature conservation ordinance.

PROBLEM ANIMAL CONTROL

NACSA acknowledges that the agricultural sector suffers great losses annually through predation or crop damage from wild animals. It, however, believes that solutions can only be found through multidisciplinary research into the problem, which strives to address the issue ecologically.

Research has shown that improper problem animal control can alter animal ecological and behavioral patterns, often compounding the problem. Sound land management practices, which allow for the co-existence of a healthy spectrum of habitats to support a spectrum of wildlife on farmlands, has proved to lessen predation on livestock. It should be common practice to, firstly, correctly identify the correct species of problem animal, and secondly, to strive to remove the particular problem animal rather than attempt to destroy the entire population occurring within the area.

NACSA is opposed to any farmer who willfully destroys any specially protected species. If such an action is deemed unavoidable, then it is incumbent upon the farmer to ensure their actions are in accordance with proper legal channels and that the local nature conservation authorities are informed. By doing so, the authorities may be given the opportunity to pursue alternative methods of addressing the problem, or, if no other options are to be found, then, official permission having been granted for such actions, valuable data may be gleaned from carcasses.

NACSA is opposed to the illegal use of poisons to control any problem species.

FIRE CONTROL

In recent years, out of control veld fires in many parts of the country have had devastating results, with loss of property, crops and livestock and, even at times, life or limb. Uncontrolled veldfires have also led to deterioration of some of our most endangered habitats.

NACSA urges all farmers to take responsibility for well planned and maintained fire prevention strategies. Tracer belts/ fire breaks must be burned well in advance of the fire hazard season.

Fire protection agencies must be viewed as intergral components of the agricultural sector and it is the duty of all farmers to contribute to such structures.

NACSA strongly condemns the senseless act of fire arsonists, whatever their motives may be.

T.H.H. PETERSON

November 2005

Signed on this day.....by(Chairperson: NACSA)
Hilton Butler