

Table Mountain National Park Position Statement: Tokai and Cecilia Plantations

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The devastating March 2015 fires which burnt Upper Tokai plantation have refocused the public's attention on the future of the area.

Over the past few months a range of letters, opinions, SMSs, advertisements and campaigns have been published and aired in the media and other platforms on the safety issue and status of remaining plantations in the Lower Tokai area of the Table Mountain National Park (TMNP).

The facts pertaining to the harvesting of plantation trees are:

1. Tokai and Cecilia are not natural forests but commercial plantations established in the early 1900s by government to provide timber for industry. Fynbos was eradicated in these areas to make way for these plantations.
2. The decision to phase out commercial plantations on the Peninsula was not made by SANParks but by central government in 1999. As the then Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, stated in Parliament at the time "...a thorough, Cabinet endorsed process was followed that led to the decision to end commercial forestry at these locations, and assign the land to SANParks."
3. The Minister also stated that it is not possible to revisit the decision to end commercial forestry as "...legal commitments are in place..." and "...neither is it considered desirable to do so."
4. The plantations are not being removed because they are alien to the Cape; they are being harvested as a planted crop grown on a commercial basis. Furthermore, the plantations are not being harvested by SANParks but by a private company, MTO Forestry, which was awarded the public tender by then Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAFF) in 2004. As part of this tender process, MTO Forestry purchased the timber plantations from Government and has a lease with DWAFF in terms of which they harvest the plantations.
5. The management of Tokai and Cecilia plantation areas and the MTO lease were formally assigned by the Minister of Forestry and Water Affairs to SANParks in 2005. The assignment included the conditions that: "Tokai and Cecilia State forests form part of the highly threatened Cape Floral Region, a World Heritage Site, and there is a need for the planned rehabilitation of the natural environment and the protection of its biodiversity" and for "...rehabilitating the natural environment and managing the land for conservation, eco-tourism and recreational purposes for use by the broader public and to create employment..."

To this end, a public process was initiated by SANParks in 2006 to prepare a vision for the future of Tokai and Cecilia. This vision is captured in the report: "Tokai Cecilia Management Framework" (March 2009), copies of which are available on the SANParks website

www.sanparks.org . Moreover the Tokai Cecilia Framework will be reviewed in 2018 through a structured public process.

The public process to develop the Management Framework followed standard procedures for such an environmental process as set out in the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act No 57 of 2003. The public, stakeholders and authorities were notified; baseline studies undertaken; issues identified; alternatives considered; all comments responded to and a preferred alternative was developed as expressed in the said Management Framework.

The consultation process went beyond the above requirements when the then Mayor of Cape Town, Helen Zille, called a roundtable discussion of experts and interested parties from all perspectives to consider the Management Framework. The process was facilitated by Prof. Richard Fuggle from UCT and the outcome was the endorsement of the framework 's proposals by the Mayor 's 'roundtable ' and the City of Cape Town in 2007. Beyond even this, some stakeholders were still dissatisfied and were accommodated in a series of discussions with SANParks, the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry.

In this context, SANParks and TMNP faced the task of seeking a compromise between diametrically opposed views: plantations for shaded recreation versus the restoration of Critically Endangered fynbos that forms an integral part of the internationally recognised World Heritage Site for the Cape Floral Region.

The Tokai and Cecilia Management Framework successfully achieved the compromise most had called for, as it sought to accommodate biodiversity, heritage, recreational and eco-tourism concerns and opportunities.

In terms of biodiversity, the Framework makes provision for the restoration of: sustainable areas of Critically Endangered Cape Flats Sand Fynbos ' and Peninsula Granite Fynbos, ecological corridors, Afromontane Forests, river and wetland systems.

Tokai is one of the last ecologically viable remnants of Cape Flats Sand Fynbos with only 14% left and only 2% conserved. Of this a high proportion is degraded and only 1% is in either fair or good condition - which is at Tokai. Thirteen plant species are extinct in this vegetation type and a further 319 plant species and 19 vertebrate species are threatened with extinction.

In terms of heritage, the need to maintain key resources such as the Tokai Manor, the Arboretum and heritage plantings were recognized as were other cultural and historical markers of Tokai Park from pre-colonial times. This entails indigenous, colonial and democratic periods in accordance with the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25 of 1999 and other international charters of which South Africa is a signatory.

In addressing the recreation issues, the Framework provides for all current recreational activities to continue at Tokai and Cecilia and for the retention and creation of certain shaded areas and routes in appropriate locations.

For ecotourism, proposals include the upgrade of the Tokai Manor precinct as a gateway to the Park with new eco-tourism products and job creation through rehabilitation projects.

Critically, the Management Framework also addresses the issue of shade provision:

- Various existing shaded areas will be retained such as the Arboretum, braai site and historic plantings (eg cork oaks, red woods etc).
- The Management Framework proposes the establishment of shaded routes at both Tokai and Cecilia. An example is the multi-use, perimeter shade route developed with stakeholders at lower Tokai. The perimeter shade route has been developed for multi-use recreational use by walkers, dog walkers, cyclists and horse riders. The route also serves as a fire break and has been planted with indigenous shade trees. At Cecilia, a shaded route planted with Silver Trees from Constantia Nek to Kirstenbosch is being implemented which will provide a mixture of sun and shade along existing heritage plantings (the cork oaks), through the riverine kloofs.
- A concept was developed in the Management Framework consultation process for the establishment of 'transition planting areas' where non-invasive exotic shade trees could be planted in designated areas in cyclical transition with fynbos. These areas are along the periphery of lower Tokai, adjacent to the Tokai Arboretum and on the lower slopes of Cecilia. The type of tree appropriate to the area will be determined through further study and consultation with stakeholders. However, prior to commencing with this intervention in any of the identified sites, at least 8 years of post-pine harvesting fynbos regrowth needs to be in place with adequate re-seeding to revitalize the seed banks.
- It must be recognised that TMNP is a World Heritage Site and nationally protected conservation area with the last remaining area of Critically Endangered Cape Flats Sand Fynbos in Lower Tokai that can be linked to the mountain fynbos. However, there are many areas within the city which can provide for recreational activities under shade trees without compromising internationally protected Critically Endangered fynbos vegetation. There are over 18km of established multi-use public open space that form part of the Constantia and Tokai greenbelt system which already provide shade and can be planted with shade trees for recreation, there are open spaces such as the Firgrove common and the public land adjacent to Lower Tokai at the end of Lower Dennedal Rd which can be used as well as many others in the area.
- It should also be noted that there are other shaded areas within TMNP which will remain as such. These include the stone pine plantings of Groote Schuur Estate, Rhodes Memorial, the Glen, Constantia Nek (parking area) and the existing shaded picnic / braai sites at Tokai, Newlands, Perdekloof and Wildschutsbrand. In addition, TMNP has undertaken a vigorous indigenous forest tree planting programme over the years with over 40 000 trees planted to augment existing Afromontane forests at Newlands and Orangetkloof and silver trees and other indigenous trees at Cecilia. More tree planting day's will be planned and members of the public will be invited to plant trees in designated areas.

In light of the above, the compromise that the Tokai Cecilia Management Framework represents is a fair and reasonable response to the often opposing views on the future of the plantations.

Since the Management Framework was prepared, the Peninsula faced another large mountain fire in March 2015. For the first time in living memory, this fire burnt deep into the Tokai plantation. This fire also brought into stark focus the serious fire threat of alien vegetation and exotic trees on the urban edge and the threat these pose to adjacent residential areas. A fynbos fire can be managed and is generally not a threat to fire proof buildings on the urban edge as it does not burn as intensely as pine and gums trees do. The idea to actively plant pine trees on the urban edge needs to be revised.

The widespread mountain fires of March 2015 burnt over 5 000 hectares of the central peninsula including a substantial portion of the Table Mountain National Park. The fire burnt through the upper and middle areas of the Tokai plantation destroying and damaging large sections of the planted commercial pine and gum compartments. Harvesting of these compartments by MTO Forestry was accelerated in order to save the commercial value of the timber before it was lost to wood rot and windfall.

As a result of the urgent post-fire harvesting of upper and middle Tokai, MTO Forestry reviewed the Tokai and Cecilia plantation harvesting schedules in line with the overall economic viability of the plantations, timber volume shrinkages, on-going infield harvesting challenges and sawmill closures. Harvesting the remaining plantations compartments is scheduled. A map of the pine and gum plantations to be harvested will as usual be placed at the Tokai library, Lower Tokai plantation, SANParks Tokai office, and Tokai, Cecilia and Constantia Nek car parks and will also be available on the SANParks website. The harvesting of compartments is continuing in terms of the MTO Forestry / Dept. of Water Affairs and Forestry lease for the Tokai and Cecilia plantations and once a compartment is harvested by MTO Forestry, the land is then released to SANParks management as part of Table Mountain National Park (TMNP).

For safety reasons the harvested areas will be closed and members of the public are requested not to enter these closed areas during the harvesting process.

In terms of the harvesting that will take place, we are acutely aware of the appearance after plantation stands have been harvested. But we can point to the highly successful rehabilitation of such plantation areas back to natural fynbos and indigenous forest, as can be witnessed at Newlands, Orangekloof, Silvermine, Vlakkenberg and rehabilitated areas of Tokai and Cecilia. Rehabilitation however takes time and challenges such as fire, erosion, invasive alien vegetation will be with us for a long time.

It cannot be assumed that the majority of the public object to the removal of plantations. Many members of the public and key stakeholders support fynbos conservation and have been volunteering for many years to assist in fynbos restoration and monitoring at Tokai and throughout TMNP. Note that when the plantations at Silvermine were exited in the 1990s there was also 'a public outcry' relating to the loss of the pine trees. Today however,

Silvermine is more popular than ever with the fynbos restored and new picnic areas created.

With regards to safety, the entire Peninsula mountain range is covered with fynbos and has more than 4 million visitors per year. On a daily basis thousands of people use the tracks and paths in the fynbos covered park for walking, running, mountain biking, horse riding, walking their dogs, sightseeing and birdwatching.

SANParks is investigating, and will continue to investigate all viable means to improve safety in Tokai, as with all other areas of the Park. Daily patrols by TMNP Rangers and Visitor Safety Officers continue in the Park, radio communications with crime watch associations are ongoing, information sharing and safety patrols with SAPS, neighborhood watches, safety forums and other agencies are ongoing and the situation is continually being monitored. Lookout towers are being considered and more signage will be rolled out in the area.

Appeals to plant trees (or retain the pines) for security purposes can be accommodated within the City 's extensive green belt system, unused public land and recreational open spaces near and adjacent to the Park. These accessible parcels of land have lower conservation significance, high recreational value and can contribute significantly to any envisaged parkscape. In fact, there has been a call to rejuvenate aging trees in some City Parks, which SANParks fully supports, along with initiatives to establish shade for communities on the Cape Flats. These are all worthwhile initiatives that deserve attention.

Actions going forward include planned public tree planting days and stakeholder participation in the review of the management framework. We welcome public involvement in projects and initiatives hosted by our citizen volunteers in the Friends Groups, Honorary Rangers and Fire-fighting teams for example and we invite the public to join these groups to assist us in conserving our natural heritage.

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