



Letters to the Editor

The following is a selection of letters to the editor of the Constantiaberg Bulletin from 2006 to 2010 on the future of Lower Tokai. Several names crop up regularly. These letters show that, over the years in which the Tokai-Cecilia Management Framework (TCMF) was hammered out – subject to a public-participation process, some members of the public made it clear that they would not accept an agreement that included the felling of pines in the Dennendal plantation. Ten years later, these people (who reside in the area) continue to call for a "compromise".

Untitled

Forests, plantations, call them what you will, they have one fundamental in common: trees. And it is among the trees, the whispering breeze overhead, and the dappled light at my feet that I recharge myself and connect with nature. It doesn't bother me that the trees are pines; the fact that they are trees is enough. For trees, irrespective of species, hold within themselves restorative power. I walk in the Tokai forests to escape stress, to unwind and to be inspired. I haven't been in the lower plantation for a while but last week I was horrorstruck when emerging from the young pines near the stream to find myself facing an expanse of scrubby land – marked off with red and white tape. The reconstitution of fynbos. To my eyes it looked like a graveyard. Acres of what looked like scrubby bush. And evidently more is planned. And this is the future we can look forward to? Thanks but no thanks. Tell me you'll replant trees (and trees) and I'll be happy; tell me I'm facing a future of Fynbos and you can keep it. I want to be able to walk in the shade surrounded by the rustling murmur of the wind above me.

Nicky Schmidt, Tokai (21 September 2006)

Pining for pine trees

With many others who enjoy the scenic and recreational assets of the Cape Peninsula, I'm seriously concerned about progressive deforestation of the mountainsides in the widely publicised programme of eliminating alien vegetation.

A principal target of the programme seems to be the pine trees in plantations.

I am not criticising commercial harvesting per se, except when it is carelessly done; mature timber must be removed and then put to good use in various industries.

But the big issue here is that the managers of Cape Town's most famous scenic asset, Table Mountain National Park, appear to have no intention whatsoever of replanting pines or any other large trees, whether indigenous or not, that may be viable or compatible with fynbos on the lower slopes.

In isolation, it sounds sensible to remove all alien vegetation and encourage fynbos growth. However, even as we value the fynbos and need to encourage its spread, it is not pleasant to walk, ride or cycle through it. It provides scarce shade, it is scratchy and it rapidly overgrows the paths.

SANParks have their hands full just keeping the paths on Table Mountain clear. Low growth also provides good cover for muggers (SANParks are struggling with this issue too).

If the outdoor-loving community ceases to enjoy use of the area because it is no longer attractive for recreational purposes (which is what will happen if all the forests are logged and not replenished), public support for conservation bodies and projects will wither.

There are great benefits in having tracts of large trees: they provide shade for picnickers, break the force of the wind, recycle carbon dioxide to oxygen, and in the maintained pine plantations there is little cover for attackers of vulnerable walkers. Besides, the forests support birds such as owls and falcon. So I urge the responsible authorities not to "throw out the baby with the bathwater".

Cape Town cannot afford this. The loss of scenic variety (the various forests being one of the city's major attractions) and of pollution-controlling "lungs" is unacceptable.

Whenever I look at the front of Table Mountain I am saddened by its increasingly arid appearance. The fynbos is evidently unable to cover the mountainside quickly enough, especially with the too-frequent fires roaring through unhindered by larger vegetation.

In selected areas between the contour path and Tafelberg Road, planting of suitable fast-growing evergreen trees should be undertaken to set up windbreaks, trap moisture, stabilise the soil, and restore some visual appeal to the slopes.

No evidence of such an objective seems to appear in the TMNP planning documents.

The small public notice on page 18 of Constantiaberg Bulletin, about harvesting Cecilia Forest from March 1 contains the alarming words "clear felled". This usually means pine debris will litter the slopes for two to three years and new dongas will appear with the winter rains.

So I appeal to TMNP to be involved during the harvesting to ensure that erosion is not facilitated, that provision is made for new big trees immediately, and to follow through with the promise of "public engagement with interested and other affected parties" (especially residents and ratepayers), starting now, not after the mountainsides have been completely stripped.

Tim Hagen, Bergvliet (21 March 2006)

Please help oppose the deforestation of a tiny part of Table Mountain National Park

While most citizens of Cape Town are probably aware of the controversy concerning the proposed removal of the forests of pine, gum and other alien trees from wooded areas of Tokai and Cecilia Forests at Constantia Nek, it is necessary to define the issue and "strike a balance".

In fact, to take up from the report by Aziz Hartley in the Cape Times, these are the words he uses and attributes to Brett Myrdal, manager of the Table Mountain National Park.

He says the park has inherited a situation arising from successive ownership of this land and these forests, with consequential obligations contained in an original lease between the State and a private forestry company (MTO).

The harvesting of the forests (he calls them plantations) is not negotiable, he says.

As we know this has been carried out judiciously from time to time in recent years, following a long period of no cutting. The frequency of harvesting is probably dependent upon the market for this kind of timber.

We understand that as a result of the buoyant economy in the Western Cape and the building boom, there is currently a great shortage of this timber at escalating prices. So we can expect accelerated cutting.

We have come to accept that harvesting is inevitable but have mostly been relieved and reconciled by the replanting of the cut trees.

Therein lies the rub. The park has declared there will be no replanting and that they will rehabilitate the land to original fynbos and that they will ultimately grow large montane forest trees to provide the shade which we so cherish.

Experts say that won't be possible. That's the issue! It's all about 2% of the total park area of nearly 30 000 hectares!

Most contracts come with obligations and rights and what Brett does not tell us is what rights the park has inherited as lessor in terms of the original lease. It is those rights that we, as opposition to the permanent removal of these forests, are interested in.

We suspect that there might be certain options available to the park which could offer an acceptable compromise.

We intend to explore this possibility in the course of the public consultation process which is now to take place over a period of more than a year at the cost of R250 000 and only commence when the park can access funds.

Unfortunately, without a written guarantee that the cutting will be deferred or at least minimised, the cutting may overtake the consultation process, resulting in nothing but a waste of money.

It is from this dilemma that we must now urgently find a way out.

The park, as manager of the land incorporated by lease from the State in 2005, now sees itself as the champion and protector of the fynbos, which as we know constitutes the greatest floral kingdom in the world and is our national heritage treasure, and which a great number of us have come to love.

The park's actions indicate that they are totally intolerant of any alien vegetation within the park, and see the forests as a threat to this heritage treasure.

We assume that also for this reason the SA National Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) has also decided to that forests (plantations) of commercial timber do not constitute a part of our heritage. This despite the fact that there are massive pine and gum trees of great age standing more than 50 metres tall.

Consequently, could this mean that they and the ancient cork oak avenue along Rhodes Drive are also to be felled?

We intend to challenge the decision SARA as to the rejection of the necessity of a heritage impact assessment, and we note that the park (as per Brett) says: "As the management authority, TMNP will be required to seek a balance between opposing views (biodiversity needs and cultural or heritage needs)."

This statement pleases us.

Now enter the ally of the Parks Board, and indeed an organisation much needed, very successful, well managed, adding significantly to the economy of the Western Cape and extremely generously funded from overseas, namely Working for Water.

Speaketh the Government's chief adviser and indeed the brains behind the organisation, the eminent scientist Dr. Guy Preston, in the Cape Times, March 31.

He, of course, is dedicated to the removal of all thirsty alien vegetation in the Western Cape for the sake of enhancing our declining water resources. What could be a more worthy cause for removing all pines and gums from water catchment areas and so, more often and more quickly, replenish our dams.

In condemning the pines and gums in Cecilia and Tokai he forgot to mention that all the water that flows and seeps down the eastern slopes of the Peninsula mountains ultimately, after much of it is captured by wells and boreholes in the Contantia flats, runs into and forms the Sandvlei at Muizenberg.

Could it be that he had anything to do with the drastic decision taken by the State and/or Province to, as they say "exit" all commercial forest plantations in the Western Cape? (For more information see <http://dwafapp4.dwaf.gov.za>.)

It's almost unbelievable when you consider our needs for timber.

Needless to say, we are informed authoritatively that said decision is now under review, the review is to exclude Tokai and Cecilia (at whose insistence, I wonder?)

Having already obtained about 1 500 signatures to our petition and received about 30 000 hits to our website, and received generous cash donations, we are now bound in the first instance to seek and have consultations with Parks Board to try to explore options for a compromise between biodiversity and cultural and heritage recreation, and specifically a detailed schedule and time-frame for the cutting which has already commenced.

We can't wait until Parks has completed its public consultation process in about two years (sic) time.

Failing that, all we can do is resort to the legal route.

Please help us to oppose this deforestation of a tiny portion of the Table Mountain National Park. Remember Pretoria had to fight to save the jacarandas.

For more information see website www.coolforest.org.za or contact us at info@coolforest.org.za.

You can download petitions, flyers and posters and pledge financial assistance.

Neil van der Spuy, The Urban Forests Protection Group 20 April, 2006

Root out invasive aliens

Neil van der Spuy does not paint an accurate picture of the control of invasive alien plants along the Table Mountain chain ("Help oppose deforestation...", Bulletin, April 20).

The Table Mountain National Park has acknowledged the need to retain areas that are under alien trees, for recreational purposes. This will be discussed in a public process, as Mr Van der Spuy well knows, and his speculation is surely mischievous.

There are difficult choices to be made. The fynbos on the lower slopes has a different composition of species to that higher up the mountain. While the control of invasives and of development higher up the mountain has been well done, the pressure on the biological diversity lower down the mountain is far greater.

This is primarily because of development, but plantations and invasions on especially private land are also part of the challenge.

The plantations have also taken land upon which the indigenous Afro-montane forest can grow, and this is a far better land cover from virtually any perspective.

It provides the shade some desire. It supports a far greater biodiversity. (Count the number and variety of birds that you see in the plantations, as one example.) It is far more resistant to wild fires. And, for those who talk of heritage, how can one compare a 300 million-year-old heritage of Afro-montane forest with a 150-year heritage of invasive pines or gums!

SANParks and its partners have done award-winning rehabilitation of areas once covered by invasives, planting Afro-montane species in their stead.

We all know that it will take time to establish these forests, and that a phased approach can be considered. But let this then emerge from the public process.

Among the primary questions that will need to be faced are how much of the low-lying areas should be retained for recreational purposes, and what species should be used to replace the existing invasive alien pines and gums when they need to be felled. (Some will be harvested; others need to be felled for safety reasons.)

The issue of risk posed by wild fires is also a factor that must influence the decisions taken by SANParks, following the public consultation.

I do hope that the public process will come out with a decision to use alternative species of alien trees in those areas to be retained under alien trees, when the time is right to cut down those invasives that are currently there.

There are many alternative species that are not invasive – only 10 of over 230 species of gum trees in South Africa are considered invasive, for example. There are alternative tree species that are not as prone to burning. There are alternative tree species that do not shed their branches (as especially gum trees do, occasionally killing people).

There are alternative tree species that do not use as much water as those that are there. Let's consider these alternatives.

It is a long-term process, and should be done in a phased manner. I accept that a portion of the lower slopes of the mountain should be zoned for high-use recreation, and non-invasive alien tree species (and even less aggressive invasive species like the stone pine) are certainly options to consider in these zones.

But I cannot understand how anyone can advocate that we continue to allow aggressive invasive species to persist, if this will lead to a loss of biodiversity, and all the other impacts in terms of water security, the intensity of wild fires, soil erosion, mud-slides, flooding, water quality in our estuaries (a favourite gripe of Hout Bay folk), the integrity of our wetlands (contrary to what Mr Van der Spuy says), and so on.

Van Van der Spuy's call to send in petitions is a democratic right – even if based on information from a sensationalist and scientifically inaccurate website.

My reaction as the leader of the national Working for Water programme to any petition is that a public process is to take place very shortly, and this is the important opportunity for people to voice any concerns and to suggest options. (This is a second major public process of the subject, incidentally, and the policies currently followed by SANParks are in line with the outcomes of the first process.)

The national Working on Fire programme (in which SANParks is a key partner) has spent millions of rands in protecting the residents along the urban edge of Table Mountain, through our helicopters and high-trained fire-fighters, and prevention work (including control of invasives).

As the co-chair of Working on Fire, I would like to know whether those advocating that we persist in using invasive trees that are "born to burn", feel any sense of accountability for the impacts that these intense, alien-fuelled wild fires will have.

It is not pleasant to have to risk our fire-fighters to protect the lives, livelihoods and properties of those who are responsible for intense fires, more so when it is through selfishness rather than ignorance. It also depletes scarce resources to fight other fires.

Finally, there are those who invoke the tree-planting work of Professor Wangari Maathai, the inspirational Nobel Peace Prize laureate, as "evidence" that any tree is a good thing.

This is what Professor Maathai said in a letter to me: "Thank you and your team most sincerely for a wonderful visit up Table Mountain and the Working for Water Programme. I was greatly inspired and encouraged by the work that you are doing to restore the mountain. It has given me new impetus for the pilot project we are working on in the Aberdare Forest in Kenya."

She has long understood the need to control invasive alien plants. So must we all.

Dr Guy Preston, Chairperson/National Programme Leader, The Working for Water Programme (4 May 2006)

Keeping it green

Neil van der Spuy ("Please help stop deforestation", April 20) seems to be concerned that after harvesting of the plantation trees in Cecilia and Tokai there will be no more replanting.

He would actually like pine trees to be replanted in these areas rather than restoration of the natural vegetation.

He says "experts" say this won't be possible. It is not clear which experts and what won't be possible.

It is unbelievable to me (and a lot of other people I know) that he and others would rather have a boring and inhospitable monoculture covering our mountain slopes than the diverse, beautiful and colourful flora that is unique to the Cape Peninsula.

From personal experience I can tell him that one just has to remove the invasive aliens and the most wonderful indigenous flora will start to reassert itself bringing with it the rich life that thrives off our fynbos and indigenous forests.

Neil van der Spuy might think it is just a small part of the Table Mountain Park (I'm not sure where he gets his 2% from) but it is a very important part because:

1 It is very visible and one of the first things that visitors see when they arrive in the Mother City.

2 Consisting of mainly south- and east-facing slopes, which are our cool, moist slopes, a fair amount of Afro-Montane forest would regenerate there, something we don't have much left of.

3 As Mr Van der Spuy says – it is part of our catchment area for water. Alien plantations, while drinking a lot, also cause run-off and erosion.

The indigenous flora acts as a sponge and slow-release mechanism ensuring all-year water, which leads to a much healthier environment for plants and animals.

While our indigenous flora is under so much threat it is extraordinary to me how people can put so much time and effort into trying to preserve invasive alien vegetation, even creating a website for the purpose.

Why don't they put all that energy into preserving and conserving our fast-dwindling Cape Floral Kingdom?

Have they any idea what a floral kingdom is and how desperately important it is to maintain its integrity?

There will always be thousands and thousands of hectares of pine and gum plantations in South Africa but every day we are losing indigenous plant species which we will never get back.

Terry Hodson, Constantia (11 May 2006)

We're not seeing the indigenous forest for the trees

It is exciting to see how much space in the community process is devoted to the environment. Let's by all means debate the issues and have our differences of opinion.

At least it appears that we are recognising the importance of our natural environment and that we can (as we must) do something to help reverse the negative impact we have had on it, particularly in the recent past, leading to the major current concern of global climate change which truly threatens the continued existence of life as we know it on this planet.

To return to the Cecilia and Tokai plantations ("Root out invasive aliens," Bulletin, May 4) we need to clarify at the outset the difference between plantations and forests.

It is emotional incorrect to refer to the pines and other exotics as "forests". Where these have been planted for harvesting, they are plantations. Where they are simply runaway growth, they constitute a mess and an even greater problem.

What we lose sight of in this debate is that before the arrival of Van Riebeeck and European settlement at the Cape, there was extensively more forest in the Peninsula than has survived today.

Would it not be wonderful to try to rehabilitate much more of this? I find it more pleasurable to walk in indigenous forests than in plantations, rather barren mono-cultures, often referred to as "deserts".

I understand that people are upset at the potential loss of shaded areas that they have become used to enjoying. However, I invite anyone for a walk on Table Mountain to areas which quite recently were covered by plantations to marvel at the incredible diversity of the restored landscape.

I am sure that in 20 or 30 years from now, we shall similarly marvel at the restoration in the plantations of today.

I agree that National Parks should have communicated much earlier, wider and more openly with the community about their plans. However, in their defence, it appears that the decision by DWAF to phase out the plantations was outside their control.

For the public's point of view of course, it little matters who took the decision. They are merely concerned with the result, which they are not pleased with.

I also agree that the phasing of the harvesting of the plantations may have been better planned. Ideally, one would have liked to see a programme whereby trees are planted in stages to lessen the impact of the removal of the plantations. I doubt whether this would have provided for sustainable harvesting of the plantations. Nevertheless, should we not have explored all the options and been part of the decision from the very outset?

Where the process currently is, one can only hope that SANParks takes notice of the real concerns of the public and truly tries to address these in a way which still allows the rehabilitation and maintenance of a very special environment, so that we may from the future, look back to a time when difficult, gut good and lasting decisions were taken.

And where our heirs may enjoy the rehabilitated areas like we today can appreciate the areas on top of Table Mountain.

Louis de Villiers, Chairman, WESSA, Western Cape (22 June 2006)

Untitled

The issue of pine trees on Table Mountain is not about statistics, scientific surveys or endless botanical talk-shops.

It's about trees binding the soil, providing shade, and being a home for raptors, squirrels and other small animals.

It's about citizens of Cape Town enjoying walks in the cool of beautiful trees, whether they are indigenous or exotics.

Ultimately, it's about life, since trees are the largest living organisms on earth and destroying them upsets the entire ecosystem.

This is an appeal to the silent majority of Capetonians to speak out about how they feel regarding this issue.

Rae Perl, Claremont (22 June 2006)

The forests are for the people

Like many Capetonians, my wife and I have enjoyed waling in Tokai Forest for past 30 years.

After a hard day's work, we could relax under the tall, quiet trees and enjoy the pine scent and song of the wind far overhead.

There is a special peaceful feeling among the cool shady pines sheltered from the hot sun and wind.

We came there first with our children when they were small; now retired, we still look forward to our daily walk with our dogs.

And there are thousands like us, no matter what time of day; there are always people enjoying this amenity.

When they return to Cape Town, my children, now grown up, enjoy hiking, climbing and mountain biking in the forests and mountains as they did before.

Visitors always envy our having forests and mountains, within only a few kilometres of the city. The pine forests protect a distinctive ecology, mushrooms, colourful flowers, many small reptiles and birds that include nesting owls, falcons and geese.

SAN Parks should recognise that in a densely populated environment like the Peninsula, some of the public land, such as forest, needs to be set aside particularly for recreation purposes, rather than pandering to theories of biodiversity.

By attempting to turn all parks back to "what was indigenous" ignores the fact that the Peninsula is no longer the place it was 300 years ago. There are more people here – who need a forest to enjoy.

What was here anyway? Early accounts show that the mountain slopes and valleys were covered in thick forests of yellowwoods, unlike the bare open fynbos and sand dunes of the Cape Flats (I was dismayed 16 years ago when forestry unwittingly chopped down a 4m young yellowwood that was growing alongside the stream when removing oaks).

As a natural scientist, I know that systems are not static, but change, so trying to restore the Peninsula back to a theoretical same-size-fits-all model is a route to nowhere.

The forests are only a very small portion of the Peninsula National Park and surely parts like Tokai and Cecilia should be retained and replanted as public recreation and picnic areas.

There are already many large open stretches of fynbos in the national park, but walking through these in summer, exposed to the blustery wind or blazing sun, is not always a good place to unwind.

Dr Clive Stowe, Constantia (4 September 2006)

Harvest time for Tokai

The tree-lined avenue that is Orpen Road, Tokai, is set change drastically as tree-felling operations in that part of the Tokai plantation get underway.

According to a spokesperson at Table Mountain National Park (TMNP), the pine trees in three compartments, measuring a total of 5.2 hectares, will be felled between now and December.

The harvesting comes as part of the 20-year lease agreement between SANParks, TMNP and contractors, MTO Forestry.

According to TMNP spokesperson Janine Willemans, harvesting also became necessary due to the safety risk that old trees pose to users of the plantation.

The three compartments to be felled along Orpen Road each cover an average of 1.7 ha.

The trees in the first compartment, the area closest to Denedal Avenue, are already being felled, with the other two set to follow soon.

Ms Willemans alerted the public to the possible dangers of the operations and warned them to be cautious when using that section of Orpen Road.

"The area has been sealed off and signage erected. However, the Park would like to appeal to the public to keep clear of the area for their safety," she said.

Ms Willemans said the harvesting was not part of the public engagement process currently underway and added that this process was being held to discuss the future of the plantation to determine how best to manage and rehabilitate the clear felled areas.

Regarding the lease, she added that "it had been assigned to SANParks and Table Mountain National Park has been tasked with rehabilitating the land as and when clear felling has been completed.

Commenting on the harvesting, John Green, chairman of the Friends of Tokai Forest, said the Friends were in favour of the felling programme, as long as it accommodated all the different uses of the forest.

"It was built into our objectives 10 years back...to create resonance between all the different uses of the forest," he said.

These included natural, commercial and recreational uses, as well as future developments.

"We need a balance between all the uses," he added.

Mr Green said that another of the Friends' goals was to find and protect the different species of plants, animals and insects inhabiting the forest, so as to "conserve them for future generations".

Regarding the tree felling, he said it was crucial to find a balance between pines and indigenous fynbos, and not let one be more dominant.

The Friends would also "like to see at least one third of the lower plantation used for sand plain fynbos", Mr Green added.

Other items on their wish list included a second access road, preferably near the stone church, to alleviate the traffic flow on Tokai Road.

They were also in favour of the Porter Manor House being incorporated into the park as a headquarters for TMNP and a visitors' centre, among other things.

Caroline Harrison (14 September 2006)

Pining for fynbos? The great debate

I am a nature lover and have walked all over this Peninsula. I am still amazed at the beauty and uniqueness of the Cape Floral Kingdom and wholeheartedly support its conservation.

I am aware that fynbos and other indigenous vegetation is threatened (sic) by imported species and support the fact that the latter should be controlled or removed where necessary. On the other hand, I chose to settle in the Tokai area because it is quiet, wind-free and surrounded and protected by attractive pine forests. I believe that life is seldom either black and white (sic) and that it is possible and indeed essential to reach a compromise. Just as I enjoy the splendour of our indigenous vegetation, I have also for the past 16 years enjoyed Tokai and Cecilia forests, first on my own for biking, walking with my dog or just picnicking and unwinding.

Now that I have a family, I enjoy the forests with my two young boys who often ask me "When can we go to the forest, mom?" In summer, the forests are cool and shady, the tall trees have a special atmosphere and it's soothing to hear the rush of the wind overhead while being sheltered from the south-easter. In winter even on the wettest days it's still lovely to walk through the forest to absorb the misty pine-scented stillness. The thought of losing this privilege and of my children not being able to enjoy it in the future is heartbreaking.

There are many Capetonians who feel the same way. Of course, the forests were planted for commercial reasons originally, but they have been around for so long that they have now become part of the infrastructure and our lives.

Apart from beautifying the neighbourhoods, the forests also play a fundamental role in sheltering the adjacent residential areas from wind.

I used to think Silvermine reservoir was one of the most magnificent spots in the world. Even while walking around one of the beautiful glacial lakes in Canada I found myself thinking of Silvermine reservoir and how I couldn't wait to get back to see it again.

When the trees were cut down and dogs were banned I was devastated, but eventually I accept the fact that this was done in the interest of conservation as the whole of Silvermine was being rehabilitated.

The fynbos and wildlife that have returned to the reservoir area are truly spectacular. Though I miss walking around the reservoir with my dog, in the shadow of the tall trees, I reasoned that this was a price I was prepared to pay.

Yet now, as more and more areas that were previously available to us are being taken away, I have started to ask myself, why should those who enjoy the existing trees be forced to sacrifice more and more until every last place to walk with a dog and every last tree is gone?

Dr Tony Rebelo ("Save the Tokai fynbos", Bulletin, September 14) labels those who wish to retain pine plantations as "fynbos haters" and condemns them to a "special corner of hell". This is exactly the kind of intolerant and extremist attitude that lies at the heart of such terrorist groups as Al Qaeda and the like.

What gives him the right to play God and decide who goes to hell?

He has obviously decided that he is "going to heaven" for saving a certain plant kingdom from extinction, but what about his attitude towards his fellow man? Perhaps there is another "special corner of hell" for misanthropes?

I believe that it should be possible to reach a compromise, whereby some areas become rehabilitated to fynbos and/or indigenous trees and some areas of pine plantation be preserved and managed. The upper slopes of the plantations particularly have become visibly leached by the imported trees.

As they are not high traffic areas they would be prime sites for rehabilitation and would be greatly beautified by the return of fynbos. The lower slopes and areas adjacent to roads such as Rhodes Drive, Constantia Main Road (Constantia Nek) and Orpen Road, as well as the area adjacent to the existing Tokai Forest picnic site and the Arboretum, are popular and high traffic areas for recreational use.

I therefore believe that rehabilitation should not take up their entirety of these areas. Portions should be preserved as areas where people can continue to walk their dogs, ride their bikes and horses, have picnics, and where children can run and play without fear of trampling sensitive vegetation underfoot. Once they have grown to a certain age where they are no longer safe to walk under, they could then gradually be replaced with indigenous trees. There is already a beautiful section in and adjacent to the Tokai picnic area with mostly indigenous trees.

Why could we not have more of these? We need areas with trees, not only fynbos. Some of the newly felled trees along the south side of Orpen Road, for example, could be planted with indigenous trees and some compartments of pine trees should be retained. I understand the importance of restoring and

conserving our rare species of sand fynbos but don't see that the entire northern side of Orpen Road has to be felled because of this. It is a very popular area for horse riders, walkers and dog walkers.

A section of pine forest should be retained in this area and again, once the trees have grown old, to be gradually replanted with indigenous trees.

There seems to be a general perception within TMNP that those who wish to preserve parts of the pine plantations fell that way because they are largely uneducated or ignorant. This is not true and an insult to the intelligence of many educated and informed people who wish to see parts of Tokai and Cecilia forests preserved for many reasons.

Secondly, their slogan reads "A park for all, forever". I have never understood this to mean only certain botanists, zoologists, biologists, conservationists and all those who agree with them. In the society in which we live we not only have a responsibility towards our environment but also and equally importantly, towards its people, which means working towards a compromise to satisfy various needs and satisfy the needs of one select group with extremist views. So I sincerely hope that "A park for all forever" means exactly that.

Sandra Hewitson, Tokai (21 September 2006)

Untitled

It's said that every picture tells a story. It's also said a picture is worth a thousand words. Well, I hope that my two pictures of flowers in the lower Tokai plantation will tell a couple of lengthy stories to at least some of those people who are getting upset about the felling of pine trees in the Peninsula. My first picture shows the 11 hectare area adjoining Dennedal Avenue West which was cleared of pine trees in 1995 and 1996, some 57 years after they were planted. This is contrary to the usual forestry practice of harvesting over 35 to 40 year periods, but I was told that public pressure resulted in the 20-year delay, by which time some 15% of the pines were infected with the Sirex wood wasp. The beautiful Chinkerinchee shown (*Ornithogalum thyrsoides*) was one of the many plants that popped up after the felling and which I had never before seen growing there. It was really exciting to walk in the plantation and to find hosts of new species virtually every day. However, the area was replanted and 10 years later most of what came up is long gone. The second photo is of the exquisite little protea *Diastella pinteoides* and was also taken in the Lower Plantation. This is a Cape Flats sand fynbos special that used to be very common but now has Red Data book status (vulnerable) and is now only found on the Peninsula in the Lower Tokai Plantation, Meadowridge Common and Kenilworth Racecourse. By far the greatest number is found in Tokai. What is interesting is that although the fire of December 1999 resulted in the germination of a number of seedlings of the *Diastella*, I found this particular plant in 1999, not in the burnt area but in the site mentioned above that had been cleared of pines in 1995 and 1996. Presumably, the seed was lying dormant for nearly 60 years. I'm looking forward to seeing the regeneration of our unique Cape Flats Sand Fynbos. Pines grow in their millions all over the world but our fynbos grows nowhere else as Dr Tony Rebelo pointed out in his excellent letter (Bulletin, September 14). But let's keep a few rows of pines for the sparrow hawks to nest in!

Sibyl Morris, Bergvliet (21 September 2006)

Save the Tokai fynbos

Dr Clive Stowe ("the forests are for the people", Bulletin letters, September 7) claims to be a natural scientist.

I am ashamed to know that any natural scientist could be so ignorant and short-sighted!

Does he not know the difference between forests and plantations?

He confuses and muddles the two to make his point.

He also calls fynbos bare and open (and muddles it with dunes). He is not a natural scientist!

The fact remains that Tokai is not just any old fynbos.

It is the last restorable remnant of Cape Flats Sand Fynbos on the Peninsula.

It is lamentable that people who should know better lump it with the well-conserved Peninsula Mountain Fynbos.

The two are as different as chalk and cheese. But then perhaps this is not obvious to one who cannot tell the difference between barren pine plantations and our rich and diverse natural forests (which are – and always were – naturally confined to fire-safe kloofs and gullies).

As if Dr Clive Stow is ignorant, what can we expect from the general public? Somebody has failed dismally in communicating the facts to us!

How can anybody in Cape Town not know that we live in one of the biggest environmental disasters in the world?

Forget about saving the Amazon, or the Antarctic.

Cape Town is an internationally declared disaster area (a "biodiversity megadisaster").

There are more species threatened with extinction in Cape Town than in any other city in the world.

It is recognised in the National Biodiversity Strategy. It is clearly stated in our City of Cape Town's biodiversity objectives that we need to urgently address this problem.

In fact, Tokai is identified as one of our core conservation sites: that is why it was included in the Peninsula National Park. And yet how can so many Capetonians still appear to be ignorant about this?

Cape Flats Sand Fynbos once covered 55 000 hectares on the Cape Flats. Today some 10 000 remain, most of it heavily invaded by wattles.

Of the southern half of this vegetation type, the only remnants are Rondebosch Common, Kenilworth Racecourse and Tokai Plantation.

The national target for conservation of this critically endangered veld type is 30%, but less than 1% is conserved.

So Tokai Plantation is not just a few percent of the Peninsula or a "very small proportion" of the Peninsula National Park – it is unarguably the most important portion of the entire park for biodiversity conservation.

To give an idea of the importance of this veld type: in 1994 there were some 74 Red Data Book plant species within Cape Flats Sand Fynbos alone.

Many countries do not have this number of threatened species, let alone a single city (Cape Town has many more if you include the Renosterveld, Strandveld and other fynbos types, but let us stick to Cape Flats Sand Fynbos for now).

Of these 74 species some six species are extinct in the wild.

Six species!

There are thought to be 56 extinct species in the whole of South Africa – so over 10% of our national extinct species occur within Cape Town, in one vegetation type that has only one ecological chance for survival in the entire southern Cape Town – in what is now a barren, sterile pine plantation.

But we hope that the seed banks are still intact and that some of these six extinct species, and many other endangered species as well, might be lurking underground, waiting for the pines at Tokai to be cleared and natural ecosystem processes to be restored.

And the really scary thing is that the Red Data List is currently being revised – and the number of threatened species is now almost double what it was in the 1990s.

And if any natural scientist in the Cape dares to claim to be ignorant of plants, then how can they have the audacity to claim any credibility if they are unaware of the insects, reptiles and mammals that have been lost? Take amphibians. Where is the hotspot of frogs threatened with extinction?

You guessed it: Cape Town lowlands. The critically endangered Micro Frog, the endangered Cape Platanna and Western Leopard Toad, and the vulnerable Cape Rain Frog and Cape Caco, make this the hotspot in southern Africa for amphibians threatened with extinction.

In fact, one in five of South Africa's threatened frog species calls Cape Flats Sand Fynbos its home. And what are we doing about it?

When are we as Capetonians going to wake up and realise that we cannot pretend that the Americans exploiting the Amazon, or the Chinese exploiting the Indonesian rainforests, are causing the crisis in world conservation?

The extinction is happening in our back garden. And what do we do?

We claim that pine trees – the same ones invading our mountains and causing extinction our biodiversity there – which are grown throughout the world, must take precedence – so we can walk our dogs.

The Constantia Green Belt – provided as an amenity by the City of Cape Town, is not good enough.

We must destroy a centre of endemism. A crown in the jewel that is the Cape Flora. The richest floral kingdom on earth. Do we really want to be remembered as the generation of Capetonians who finally destroyed one of the core areas of the Cape Flora World Heritage Site (Nero fiddled – Capetonians walked their dogs in their flora's ashes)?

Do we really want to go to our maker knowing that we were the ones who helped destroy his most bountiful of creations, the most special of his floral kingdoms? I wonder what his response will be.

Is there a special corner in hell for fynbos haters?

Do we really want our children to never hear the snore of the Leopard toad, the rain chorus of the Cape Rain Frog, smell the fragrance of the Snakestem Pincushion, and bask in the glory of Sunshine Conebushes in autumn and fields of heather and bulbs in spring?

Is our legacy to them going to be a pine plantation – a common commercial crop?

Unprocessed paper?

There is nowhere else in the world where one can see Cape Flats Sand Fynbos.

Now is our chance to make sure that there will still be a place, somewhere that hundreds of nearly extinct plant and animal species can call home: a place more precious than all the pine plantations on earth.

A place in the heart of Cape Town that only we can save.

Ours only, forever!

Dr Tony Rebelo, SA National Biodiversity Institute, Kirstenbosch (14 October 2006)

Untitled

Dr Clive Stowe argues that the pine plantations (he mistakenly calls them forests) are for the people. But what about the other animals?

I like observing reptiles. Reptiles do not survive in a pine plantation such as Tokai, which has no or very little other vegetation growing underneath.

Reptiles need food, shelter and warmth at the least, none of which occur under alien pines, which are biologically sterile wastelands.

There is hardly any shelter or hiding places under the pines as the logs and branches are often cleared away during forestry operations. The pines shade out all the other plants which provide cover and shelter for reptiles, leaving barren, open wasteland where any animal is easy meat to a few forest birds of prey.

Reptiles will feed on a variety of things such as rodents, amphibians, other reptiles, insects and some species, such as tortoises, eat plants.

The animals under the pine plantation are limited mostly to woodlice and other little insects that burrow in the wood (apart from the alien squirrel and alien chaffinch).

Pine plantations provide no food to our indigenous mice, and only a few insects survive. Deserts are more productive as food resources!

As to the diversity and abundance of plants in the undergrowth, I don't need to say anything – because there is nothing to say; instead of hundreds of exciting and rare species there are just pine needles and the occasional etiolated survivor.

By contrast, in fynbos many rodents, insects and tortoises feed on the many indigenous plants which they have adapted to.

The only times I've found reptiles in the pine plantation is in winter when some move under fallen pine logs to over-winter.

These species are the Cape Skink and Brown Water Snake.

Most reptiles and other animals on the Cape Peninsula have adapted for living in fynbos and not in pine plantations.

I must say that the fynbos rehabilitation in Tokai is helping to reestablish reptile populations and more and more are moving in as the fynbos comes back.

All that adults in the pine plantations see is a place to walk their dogs. Why can they not see how important our fynbos is for the other plants and animals as well?

Alex Rebelo, Bergvliet 14 October 2006

Balance needed in parks

Sandra Hewitson's letter "Pining for fynbos?" (Bulletin, September 21) is the most balanced letter I have read on this "great debate".

Surely we cannot, and must not go the "purist" route of clearing all plantation species from the Park? National Parks and biodiversity conservation are a human construct, thus parks must also cater for the needs of humans in the landscape — and already we have seen cultural and archaeological sites reserved by SANParks, so why not historical sites, like plantations?

Sandra calls for a balance between some plantations and fynbos, while Tony Rebelo, the arch fynbos purist ("Save the Tokai fynbos", Bulletin, September 14), wants all plantation species out of the Park, and others want much larger areas of plantation to remain. And so the debate rages, with SANParks in the middle.

The Table Mountain National Park is "A park for all people" and it is extremely difficult to balance all the needs of all the people all the time. Particularly when you have a tradition of excluding people and catering only for indigenous biodiversity, and you manage a Park in the most threatened biodiversity hotspot globally. However, SANParks must consult with all people, as that is also their mandate, and clearly some plantations must stay and be managed in perpetuity as they are as much a part of the history of Cape Town as the mountain.

Eugene Moll, Kirstenhof (12 October 2006)

Where will all the pine trees be – by 2025?

By 2025, all the pine trees in the Cecilia and Tokai plantations will be gone and no new plantations will be established in their places.

The pines will be cut down in blocks over the next 20 years and sold for timber, and the indigenous fynbos and Afromontane forests reestablished.

Within the next 10 years, most of the pines will be gone from the lower areas of Tokai.

There will be shady areas on the lower slopes of both Cecilia and Tokai, where trees will be planted around recreational spots. No invasive aliens will be used.

All forms of recreation that are currently allowed in the plantations, including dog-walking, will still be allowed once the plantations are gone.

These are some of the proposals in the Table Mountain National Park's draft management framework for the Tokai and Cecilia plantations.

Park head Brett Myrdal said in a press briefing that this was a "broad-brush" management plan, on which the public had 30 days to comment.

Table Mountain National Park has a 20-year lease to manage the 1 000ha which make up Cecilia and Tokai plantations, and MTO Forestry, formerly Safcol, has the right to harvest the 600ha of pines during this time.

The lease excludes replanting of trees for commercial harvesting.

When the lease expires in 2025, Tokai and Cecilia will be incorporated into the park.

Proposals to fell the pines have met with strong opposition from many Capetonians, who have launched petitions to keep the pines.

Mike Slayen, operations manager for the park, said he understood their sentiments.

"It's difficult for many people, because they have lived with pines all their lives and felling trees is quite a brutal process.

"The objective of the Cabinet in giving us this land on lease was to have it incorporated into the national park after the plantations had been harvested. Once that happens, the land is secured for posterity.

"Having Cecilia and Tokai remaining as plantations outside the park could see them come under strong pressure to be sold for real estate, and then they would be lost to the public forever," Mr Slayen said,

Cecilia and Tokai are currently owned by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry.

At Cecilia, the pines will be felled from the upper slopes first, to prevent seeds spreading up the mountain.

Proposals are that Tokai Manor, owned by the province, will become the new park head office, while the Arboretum will be retained as a heritage site.

Hiking, dog-walking and horse-riding will continue to be allowed at both Cecilia and Tokai, and mountain-biking and braaing will also be allowed at Tokai. Mr Myrdal said the fynbos seed bank stayed dormant in the soil for up to 100 years. Successions of pines had been planted in Cecilia and Tokai over the last 90 years.

"So we're just in time. We will also be expanding the seed gathering project that Pixie Littlewort started.

"We employ 40 people who gather seeds from the forests and grow these in the nursery, and when they are 1m high, they are planted in the park. We have already planted over 40 000 indigenous trees in four years. We want to expand that and welcome volunteers to assist," said Mr Myrdal.

Mr Slayen said the removal of pines would allow the regrowth of the critically endangered sand plain fynbos on the lower slopes of Tokai. There were only 2% of this left in the world, which was to be found only at Tokai, Blauwberg Hill and inside Kenilworth Racecourse.

"But Tokai is the only place which has a vegetation corridor stretching from mountain fynbos to lowland fynbos," Mr Slayen said.

Once the fynbos and Afromontane forest had become reestablished, dogs, people, horses and bikes would have to keep to designated routes.

"At the moment people and animals go anywhere in the plantations, but we will have to develop designated routes in the future," Mr Slayen said.

In Tokai, dogs and horses are currently allowed no higher than the "level 2 road", which will remain in force.

The pines on the lower slopes of Tokai will be the last block to be felled.

This document is available on www.tmnp.co.za or at public libraries.

Staff reporter, Constantiaberg Bulletin, (26 October 2006)

Untitled

I hereby wish to comment further on the Tokai Cecilia issue. "The felling will continue until morale improves". This may as well be the new slogan for Table Mountain National Park. "A park for all forever" certainly appears to be a lie.

I hereby wish to express my disappointment and disillusionment in the South African National Parks (SANParks), and specifically, TMNP.

Despite the public outcry against the felling of the entire Tokai and Cecilia plantations, the plan is to continue the clear-felling over the next 20 years, even though it will take much longer for indigenous trees (if any will be replanted) to reach a suitable maturity. When I spoke to a TMNP official recently, he estimated that the ratio of people for and against the 20-year felling programme is approximately 50/50. I think the percentage of people against the felling programme is greater than 50%, but even if we conservatively leave it at 50%, how does TMNP continue to ignore 50% of the public?

First, by continually repeating that this group is 'misinformed and emotional' — a favourite phrase used to dismiss legitimate outrage.

Second, by continually claiming that this group is ignorant of conservation/biodiversity issues — not true, many people have indicated their awareness and willingness to compromise on this matter, or proposed a slower transition, but TMNP remain "non-negotiable".

And third, by continually insisting that TMNP are not responsible for the felling and that their hands are tied — not true — it's a matter of renegotiating the lease with MTO, the harvesting company, and the department of water affairs and forestry (DWAF).

In August, after a lot of digging, I became aware that a public engagement process relating to Tokai/Cecilia was supposedly underway and that one could register as an interested and affected party with TMNP, which I duly did.

I then distributed hundreds of copies of the registration to the general public (such faith had I) and in the process discovered that most of the people I spoke to had no idea of what was happening to the plantations, or had any knowledge that the public could supposedly participate. After further digging and endless phone calls, I found that the closing date for the first batch of comments and proposals was September 15. This was extremely badly publicised. I duly submitted my comments and proposals on

time but they were not included in the "Issues and Response Report" which was issued on September 22.

How could this lengthy report have been collated and issued in only four working days? Had it already been collated long before — which would explain why my comments had not been added? To me this is indicative of an undemocratic process. Most of the responses read "noted", "to be considered by MF" (Management Framework), or "to be addressed". This appears to be lip-service and nothing more than a cosmetic exercise. The report also states: "Currently Tokai is closer to the urban side but MF will attempt to shift Tokai closer to the natural side. This implies that people's perceptions need to shift."

This clearly seems to indicate TMNP's intention to turn Tokai plantation into another nature reserve, with consequent entry fees and rules and regulations, even though Silvermine is only 10 minutes away.

The public engagement process only relates to the already clear-felled sections. TMNP have thrown their hands up and said: "We are not the agency harvesting the trees" and "the public engagement only relates to the rehabilitation aspect". Why was the public not engaged on the felling program, when it is a "park for all", and at least half the public are extremely distressed by the accelerated felling?

The entire so-called public-engagement process has been exceedingly badly publicised — unlike nearly full-page statements in major newspapers by Brett Myrdal (TMNP) or the Botanical Society, defending their actions — and most of the general public remain unaware of it. Not that it would make any difference.

TMNP has a history of not engaging the public when the trees were removed from Silvermine Nature Reserve and many other incidents. It seems that SANParks and TMNP have an undemocratic dictatorial style of management and are not interested in what people think, want or need.

(This letter has been shortened)

Sandra Hewitson, Tokai (12 October 2006)

SANParks process flawed

The draft public participation process related to the TMNP (table Mountain National Park) for Tokai and Cecilia forests is seriously flawed, in that it only relates to the already clear-felled areas of these plantations, the far-reaching decision to permanently remove the plantations was made without re-engaging or informing the public, and TMNP have stated that the decision is non-negotiable.

As the public was never consulted, in November a group of concerned citizens conducted various independent sample surveys. In each survey every randomly selected person that was interviewed voluntarily answered questions, signed a questionnaire and gave personal contact details. The first survey was done in the Tokai picnic site. A total of 342 picnickers were interviewed, 310 (91%) did not know of the proposal to fell the lower portion of the picnic site before 2010, and to fell remaining pine trees in stages. In the draft the impact of felling on the picnic site is described as low. Results from the survey show this to be completely untrue: 316 (92%) prefer the pine trees in the picnic site to any other

trees: 330 (99%) were opposed to the removal of the pine trees; three (0,8%) were ambivalent, and said a balance was needed between pine trees and indigenous trees; one (0.2%) said that he was in favour, but for every pine tree felled and indigenous tree should be planted. For most people interviewed the pine trees are of high significance and the central focus of a family tradition, and are therefore an issue of cultural heritage.

The second survey was done in Tokai and Cecilia forests. A total of 215 people (walkers, dog walkers, bikers and horse riders) were interviewed. 192 (90%) were opposed to the permanent and complete felling; 20 (9%) were ambivalent and advocated a balance between shaded recreation areas and fynbos rehabilitation; three (1%) supported the felling, but were under the impression that large-scale replanting of indigenous trees would take place; 93 (43%) were unaware that the felling was permanent and part of the exit strategy. Many said that had frequented the forests all their lives and that these areas were part of the historical heritage of Cape Town. The overwhelming response to the question "Where would you go if this forest is gone?" was "I don't know". The third survey was done in the tea garden in the Tokai Arboretum. The document suggests that the tearoom be converted in an interpretation/education facility and the tearooms be moved to a central visitor site. SANParks have alleged that the person responsible for the survey and subsequent petition (i.e. yours truly) is misinformed".

I'm surprised that they left out "emotional", an important part of the new litany sung to anyone who dares to question SANParks proposals and actions regarding Tokai and Cecilia.

How can quoting the draft almost verbatim be construed as misinformed? It is only since the matter became public through the survey and petition that SANParks have entered into discussion with the current operator of the tea garden.

A total of 122 patrons and the general public were interviewed. 100% were in favour of keeping the the garden open in its current location; 80 (65%) were unaware of the proposal to convert the tea garden, including the current operator who was informed by a friend. A petition to keep the tea garden open in its current location, which circulated for only 10 days, was signed by more than 300 people. The main thread that runs through the surveys is that all people surveyed agreed that they had not been consulted or surveyed in any way.

It is clear that what has been greatly lacking is discussion with the people who use the areas and facilities. There are many ways in which a feasible win-win solution and a common vision can be achieved for Tokai and Cecilia, provided that the comments submitted by the public are reviewed seriously. I urge all affected and interested people to register as stakeholders with TMNP at the Westlake head office and to submit comments to tokai@geostratics.co.za by Friday December 15.

Sandra Hewitson, Tokai (7 December 2006)

Viva fynbos!

Thanks Rob Erasmus ("Wild-fires: Time for an open minded perspective?" Bulletin, April 19) for a refreshing summary of fynbos fire ecology.

It is hard to believe that we live in a country where three of the major biomes – savanna, grassland and fynbos — are dominated by fire! How have people become so out of touch with nature that they do not know these facts?

However, unlike those ecosystems which burn almost annually, fynbos only burns every 10-40 years. This makes fynbos fires hotter, far more dangerous, and results in people forgetting about the last fire.

After all, on average, we only encounter a fire four times during our lifetime at any one place.

But the world has become a smaller place and fires near Cape Town are news items (although I don't think that the Easter Groot Swartberg fire was reported much).

There are three reasons why prescribed burns are done.

Firstly, as Rob points out, it reduces the fuel loads: the less fuel the more manageable the next fire.

The downside of this is that fire managers try to burn the veld while it is still young. Research has shown that after 15 years the Proteaceae start dominating the cover and that this is important in maintaining diversity.

Still the occasional fire in veld is not a threat to most plant and animal species. Fires in young veld are patchy (so some individuals survive in unburnt patches), and fires are cooler, so that rocky areas and hill crests function as refugia for species.

Secondly, there is the season of fire. Although summer is the ideal fire season (Rob seems to think that this is controversial — but when do most fires occur?), prescribed burns can be done during cooler seasons when it is far easier to control fire.

Ideally too, just before a cold front, which will put out any embers and thus stop the fire dead.

The danger of this is that fynbos has evolved with summer fire: the plants and animals are adapted to fires in the hot and dry season.

After the first autumn rains and throughout winter and until it gets too dry in late spring/early summer the animals and plants are actively growing and breeding. Fires too late in autumn and too early in spring will kill nestling birds and young buck, frogs that are not aestivating (summer-hibernating), and plants that have not yet set this year's seed supplies.

Thirdly, the most significant reason for a prescribed burn is that one can arrange for teams of fire-fighters to be present.

This is not so easy to arrange when fires have not been planned and crews may have to be divided between several fires in the Western Cape.

Prescribed burns (at any time of the year) are thus far safer to hikers, houses, crops and infrastructure than unplanned fires.

Within the Table Mountain National Park it is not feasible to allow many more unplanned fires (although these will happen with predictable regularity) because the park is now an island within Cape Town.

My only gripe is that Rob was too open-minded. The ants that disperse fynbos seed do not do so after fires — those species of plants that release their seeds after fires do not need ants: the seeds were protected in the fire-safe cones and will now blow around until they germinate with the next rains.

It was the species that dropped their seeds before the fires that needed the ants to bury the seeds so that they would be safely stored in the ants' nests (for over 60 years in some species!) when the fire burned down nearly everything above ground.

These species need the hottest fires to allow them to germinate.

By contrast, some species merely drop their seeds — some such as daisies, are destroyed in hot fires, but dominate the landscape after cool fires.

It is the interplay between these guilds that makes fynbos so diverse.

The same location will yield entirely different communities after a hot versus a cool fire. And a burn in old veld will be dominated by over-storey proteas, but one in very young veld will be dominated by bulbs and resprouting shrubs. Thus an occasional fire in the "wrong season" is not a disaster.

Viva fynbos: the fire lilies have already finished flowering, and this winter the orchids will be wonderful.

Next year's spring the bulbs will be at their best. Three to four years from now the heaths will light the veld pink, and sunbirds will start dominating the communities. And thereafter the sunshinebushes and proteas will blaze the landscapes and sugarbirds will flock to the cornucopia.

By then the veld be ready to burn again, but hopefully will reach 15-30 years before the cycle is repeated.

The fynbos phoenix has risen this Easter at Cape Point: go and enjoy! Your next opportunity to experience the splendour of fynbos regeneration there might only be in 30 years' time.

Dr Tony Rebelo, Bergvliet (31 May 2007)

Get info from SANParks

Despite SANParks' so-called public participation process regarding the clear-felling of Tokai and Cecilia plantations many people, judging from letters in the press, remain unaware of the full realities and impact.

Not only will we lose prime recreational areas but we will also lose a valuable cultural landscape. The outcry from the public continues to make it apparent that they do not support the felling, yet most struggle to find information pertaining to the felling and other SANParks' actions. A loose alliance of concerned individuals and groups has been formed and any member of the public wishing to find more information can do so on www.parkscape.org.za.

Pat Hagen, Bergvliet (26 April 2007)

Protect our forests

Some of the most beautiful forests in Cape Town are being decimated in a matter of days. All that remains of the first kilometre in Cecilia Forest from Constantia Nek is total devastation; widespread erosion, mud flows and an eery (sic) silence. This haven of forests, part of the rapidly disappearing belt of old plantation forests, once constituted some the tiny 2% of forests in the Table Mountain Reserve. This is rapidly shrinking, while 98% and more is reserved for fynbos. In the name of ecology, fanaticism and possible greed, even this 2% is too much.

It is clear that to SANParks, the new management body of the Table Mountain National Park, Table Mountain and its surrounding forests — the guts and crown jewel Cape Town, is not a people's park but rather a "bio-reserve" serving SANPark's own purposes. Imagine New York without Central Park and London without Hyde Park. Well, we are losing our park!

It has been agreed by international scientists studying the effects of global warming, that fynbos and the afro-montane trees, will eventually retreat into the higher catchment areas, kloofs and ravines, with many species facing extinction. With failure of fynbos to reinstate itself, and increased pressure on afro-montane forestry, SANParks could even restrict access to these areas in the future. It also intends to release conservation land for low-income housing, as the "proactive way of dealing with land hunger and land invasion."

Situated at a distance of 1 300 miles in Pretoria, SANParks is dictating the rules regarding our beloved Table Mountain Reserve. Since its appointment, the tahrs were sent crashing down onto the rocks below, the deer are to be disposed of, dogs may be barred access, and now the magical forests are being converted into a wasteland. The giant trees, previously home to raptors, owls and other birds of prey, are almost completely destroyed. Baboons use these pine trees as an escape route from humans and without this escape route, they become threatened and in turn, become more threatening to us as a form of self-preservation.

Consider that pine trees, amazing carbon and pollution absorbers and remarkable oxygen producers (far outstripping the likes of fynbos), are being targeted as "aliens". In a typically inconsistent manner, vines, roses, camphor trees, oaks, (not to mention humans), are inexplicably exempt.

By ridding the Table Mountain Reserve of its mere 2% "natural lung system", we are making fools of ourselves!

Perhaps the real explanation is with an agreement between SANParks DWAF (Department of Water Affairs and Forestry), and MTO (an amalgamation of Cape Sawmills and "Wild Peach" — a black-owned company). MTO has leased the Cecilia Tokai plantations for 70 years for a mere R45 000 a year (this agreement includes harvesting rights where the timber alone is worth more than R3 billion).

We are aware that this was intended as a commercial forest, but whilst SAFCOL managed wisely, by harvesting only 1/25th of the forest annually and replanting immediately, SANParks clear-cutting it in one go without replanting. SANParks with the help of a couple of local fanatics is converting our beautiful Cape Town into a semi-desert, windblown and desolate.

Ecology and politics aside, stop and think about what is happening to our forests, our walks, our shade, our tranquility ... and even more important than our needs, to the trees themselves, some of which have been here for much longer than we have. Hundreds of them are being cut down daily without our consent or even our knowledge. It is not too late to save what is left.

- Visit www.coolrorest.org.za and parkscape.org.za to find out more.
- This letter has been shortened

Shelley van Braningen, Hout Bay (14 June 2007)

Without 'aliens', this would be a wasteland

Do Capetonians really understand the vision of their beautiful city that is held by the eco-zealots who plan to cut down most of the trees that adorn Cape Town on the grounds that they are "alien"?

On that basis, as previously observed, we'd have to remove vineyards, roads, pets, people and almost everything that makes Cape Town what it is today.

The Cape Town that these zealots want to see is unlikely to be one that its residents would vote for.

It would have few trees left, little shade and far less physical beauty and variety.

Not that the residents have been asked.

This so-called policy is being done "to" them without their express consent, slipped through as the local implementation of a general governmental policy. Yet my straw poll of residents, academics and tree experts has identified not one supporter of these plans, but total opposition to it.

How could such an unpopular policy be enacted in a country that seeks to show the world its democratic credentials?

And how will the world regard this unrepresentative and visibly scarring policy?

Not only will tourist income and related employment be threatened by the revulsion of visitors,, but South Africa's reputation as a tolerant and inclusive society would be damaged as the world quickly understood the xenophobic nature of this policy – even though the xenophobia is hidden behind claims about water usage and fire risk.

And as for South Africa's "green" credentials, how could they be enhanced if the world were to realise the scale of the carnage that this policy will inflict upon global warming by destroying whole forests in the name of nationalism?

What will become of Kirstenbosch, denuded of its alien species, and what of every road, park, garden or vista that we know and love today?

Do we really understand the vision of a city denuded of its trees, like a post-nuclear bomb landscape, that the eco-zealots are already beginning to turn into a reality?

Is that what we all want?

Ian Cormack, Tokai (11 January 2007)

City pines to go ... dogs to stay

The felling of exotic pines in Cecilia and Tokai plantations to allow the natural vegetation to grow back takes precedence over the public's desire for shade and over the heritage status of the plantation landscape.

Within 20 years the pines will be gone. But Table Mountain National Park will plant trees for shade in picnic areas, and may also plant trees to create a shaded link for walkers from Contantia Nek to Kirstenbosch.

These are some of the points made by the park in its report that responds to key public concerns regarding the draft management plan for the future of Tokai and Cecilia plantations.

Called the "comments and response report", it is not the final management plan for the two areas, but the park's comments are a strong indication of what the final report will contain.

Although the felling of the alien pines has created heated debate among Capetonians, with calls from many quarters to leave them to allow shade for recreation, SANParks is firm in its stance that doing so would conflict with its statutory mandate to conserve indigenous plants and animals.

However, it acknowledges that it needs to accommodate recreational users, but will do so only if this does not compromise the integrity of indigenous ecosystems.

Dog-walking areas, another controversial topic, will remain unchanged until the environmental management programme for dog-walkers is reviewed.

There have been calls to leave intact the plantations as they are heritage landscapes. The report says a heritage assessment specialist found that commercial plantations, by their nature, provided for change over time.

Once the pines were felled in 20 years, other planted areas and the Arboretum would "give spatial embodiment to plantation landscape". The public needed to recognise the significance of indigenous ecosystems, representing millions of years of evolution, as a heritage resource, the report said.

It also said the decision to sell Tokai and Cecilia plantations to MTO for felling had been made by the national government.

After negotiations between the departments of Environment Affairs and Water Affairs and Forestry, the land was assigned to SANParks.

"This flows directly from the original cabinet decision that public and private conservation worthy land, including the Tokai and Cecilia plantations, be brought under the management of a single conservation authority, namely SANParks.

"The management framework is thus driven by a decision taken at national government level, with the mandate to SANParks to manage the area in terms of applicable legislation and policies," said the report.

Other park responses to public comments include current recreational activities in lower Tokai will continue, but in rehabilitated fynbos and shaded areas which may include indigenous and non-invasive exotic trees to be determined; the picnic area will remain, but it will be "reconfigured".

- The report is available on www.tmnp.co.za

Unattributed, Constantiaberg Bulletin (29 March 2007)

How do I explain to my kids that Tokai Forest is gone?

I am severely concerned about the ongoing tree-felling in the southern suburbs and around the Peninsula.

The forest planted by settlers over 100 years ago is now being wiped out within days.

I cannot understand how politicians can force their rights to destroy the natural beauty of the Cape, the environment and the recreation areas of citizens and tourists.

How beautiful and relaxing it was to drive up from Constantia to Constantia Nek through the magnificent forest.

Now it is a drive through pure sun with private vineyards that are separated by ugly concrete walls.

How shall I explain to my children that Tokai forest, where we spent wonderful afternoons with lovely hikes and took many family photographs, is just gone?

How can politicians follow some vague and scientifically unproven idea "to restore the former natural vegetation" by planting vineyards, fynbos and building new settlements?

Fynbos is as artificial to the Cape as pine trees.

How can somebody allow the destruction of a huge amount of forest in a big city instead of rather spending this amount of money to plant trees and shrubs in the townships?

The government and mayor of Cape Town should have the dignity to preserve the non-political heritage of South Africa.

Professor Edda Weimann Hildesheim (12 April 2007)

Protest over pine harvesting

Eight people staged a demonstration at Constantia Nek on Wednesday June 13 to protest against the harvesting of the pine plantations.

They were protesting outside the restaurant where a high-powered meeting was taking place to discuss the future of the plantations. Roleplayers at the meeting included SANParks, representatives of the department of water affairs and forestry (DWAF), the Urban Forest Protection Group (UFPG) and the City of Cape Town.

However, the Bulletin reporter was not allowed to stay for the meeting or the site inspection. The protesters were led by Shelley van Braningen of Hout Bay who, in a letter to the Bulletin, said, "Some of the most beautiful forests in Cape Town are being decimated in a matter of days. All that remains of the first kilometre in Cecilia Forest from Constantia Nek, is total devastation, widespread erosion, mud flows and an eerie silence."

The flyers which were being handed out by the small group of protesters read in part "Foreigner species" being removed from "a tiny 2% of the 30 000 ha of the TMNP & cannot represent any threat to the conservation of the endemic Fynbos.

"We see these forests as a heritage and essential recreation concern. Recently there was a "public participation process" which we consider to have been too late (sic) for the public to have had an effective say on the future of the parks forests. We also believe the process was **FATALLY FLAWED** (what's the point?)..."

However, Professor Eugene Moll of Kirstenhof, and chairman of the Botanical Society, said, "This whole issue has got out of hand and sanity no longer prevails. It seems that there are radicals on both side of the issue and all have become too polarised and emotional."

Dr Tony Rebelo, of the National Biodiversity Institute and author of many books and papers on fynbos ecology and conservation, said: "The term "forests" is a misnomer. Generations of locals living on the flanks of these 100 year-old plantations are accustomed to the sound of the chain saw harvesting of commercial pines."

An environmental journalist said: "Like mielies, they are planted to be harvested, and eaten, although in the case of the pines, to be pulped for paper."

According to the latest City of Cape Town biodiversity assessment the "tiny 2% of TMNP" is peninsula granite fynbos. It is critically endangered and needs to be conserved in Tokai and Cecilia plantations.

The TMNP said that objectors largely continue to ignore the fact that it was in fact DWAF who, in 2005 decided to discontinue commercial forestry here and that the land, once cleared of timber, should be incorporated into the national park.

The plantations were sold to MTO Forestry, the commercial timber company that won the public tender. It was decided that SANParks manage the 400 hectares of 'conservation and recreation' land, while MTO Forestry is responsible for the commercial harvesting of hectares of plantation land.

Once the land is cleared it cannot be used for housing development because it becomes part of TMNP and the Cape floral kingdom world heritage site. Therefore it will receive the highest level of protection and can only be used for purposes of a national park, the TMNP said.

However, Professor Moll said that: "if all the plantations are clear-felled and made over to fynbos this fire climax vegetation type (fynbos) will not be properly managed — by which I mean burned on a 10 to 40 year cycle. This fynbos will be in the immediate vicinity of the urban edge, and modern people are dislocated from nature and do not understand the role of fire — and get all emotional about destruction and devastation."

A SANParks spokesperson who was at the Constantia Nek meeting later told the Bulletin that the group toured the TMNP and visited three sites - Constantia Nek where pines are being felled by MTO forestry, Orangekloof where TMNP has successfully restored the afro-montane forest and the cleared area of the Tokai plantation, to see the granite fynbos restoration site.

To address the future of the plantation areas once harvested, TMNP initiated a public process to prepare a long-term plan to guide the rehabilitation and use of the area.

The plan allows for the current recreational in Tokai to continue. However, the landscape will change, by providing a combination of shaded areas and rehabilitated areas (fynbos, river and riverbanks).

At the meeting the lobby group was also informed that TMNP will hold back the release of this plan in order to be guided by a report being prepared by the City of Cape Town. Mayor Helen Zille urged SANParks to consider ways of mitigating some of the negative impacts of the felling of commercial plantations, such as planning for substantial afforestation in alternative areas.

TMNP has called for urgent investigations for alternative areas and routes for tree planting particularly along pedestrian trails.

Angus Wilson of UFGP, who was at the meeting said, "One of the major concerns is that in 2003 Ronnie Kasrils, (the then minister of water affairs and forestry) wanted Tokai and Cecilia plantations "to remain part of the plantations' management plan allowing public access and enjoyment of the area as well as commercial forest activities."

Mr Wilson said that SANParks made the decision to clear the plantations over a 20-year period without consultation with the citizens of Cape Town. He was disappointed at the outcome of the meeting, but he hoped that the task team report, which is due this week, will contain a compromise.

At a meeting with the mayor, SANParks acknowledged the need to provide for recreational activities. They said they would accommodate recreational users but will not compromise on the integrity and viability of ecosystems to be conserved. Consideration will be given to providing a shaded link from Constantia Nek to Kirstenbosch.

The heritage significance of the critically endangered and irreplaceable ecosystems unique to the area needs to be conserved and recognised as a heritage resource. The park is a major economic, social and environmental asset to the City, SANParks said.

Brett Myrdal, manager of the TMNP says that "some portions of Tokai and Cecilia may be replanted, depending on the input we receive from the public." He said that 20 years is a long time on a human life scale.

"It takes 100 years for a forest to recover. A forest is for generations and we should bear in mind what we leave for our children – the opportunity to walk in 'real' forests. I think that should be our legacy."

Karen Watkins, Constantiaberg Bulletin (21 June 2007)

Protect fynbos

Shelley van Braningen's plea to keep the pine plantations is a little like someone advocating that cows and chickens be protected instead of endangered wildlife ('Protect our forests', Bulletin, June 14).

Like cows and chickens there is an increasing number of pine plantations in South Africa due to the world's insatiable need for paper.

The Cape floral kingdom can be likened to a lot of our wildlife – threatened by habitat loss, many of its individual species, facing extinction in the wild. Apart from having an amazing variety and beauty in its plants, this floral kingdom serves many important functions, two of its important being to conserve water and to provide a habitat for the fauna of the Cape.

Fynbos holds water like a sponge and slowly releases it during the dry season, while pine trees gobble up water at an amazing rate. Someone once remarked to me that growing plantations for the pulp industry overseas was like exporting our water out of the country.

Its provision as a habitat for our fauna is of no less importance, as animal and insect species become more and more threatened. One of course, is the peninsula baboon which relies on fynbos to provide it with food. Pine tree plantations support no life at all.

Even the exotic grey squirrel cannot live on pine nuts alone and while certain birds might roost on pine trees, it not the pine trees that provide their food.

There is no truth to several things mentioned in Ms Van Braningen's letter. There is no evidence that pine trees absorb more carbon dioxide than fynbos and indigenous trees, nor release more oxygen for what that is worth.

There is absolutely no evidence that SANParks is going to give any of its land for housing. Pretoria is not "dictating rules regarding our beloved Table Mountain". Parks people here are doing a better job than has ever been done before.

During the apartheid era our mountain areas were sorely neglected – invasive vegetation was allowed to grow unhindered and no importance was given to our unique vegetation. Today, most of the invasive vegetation been cleared and we are seeing paths maintained, natural fauna reintroduced and hiking trails established.

SANParks should be congratulated on what they have achieved. Due to increasing development that will unfortunately continue, the fynbos biome is shrinking. And yes, it might face other threats like global warming later — all the more reason to protect as much of it as possible now.

There are many people in Cape Town who are looking forward to the day when our true natural heritage is restored and we can look up to our mountain slopes and see what we now see only above Kirstenbosch. This will be the real Jewel of Cape Town.

Terry Hodson, Constantia (21 June 2007)

Park needles pine protesters – protection group asked for proposal

Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) have asked the little-known group known as Urban Forest Protection (UFP) to present a proposal for the park by August 31.

This was said at the annual meeting, held on Wednesday last week at Contantia Nek. The Bulletin was invited to attend. The issue caused a row among the 12 people who attended the meeting, most whom have been walking the mountain for many years.

"We've been shafted," said UFP's attorney Jack Segall. "I've been a practicing attorney for many years and know bullshit when I see it."

"They're (TMNP) playing delay tactics. Submit the report sooner and give an ultimatum," said Shirley van Braningen.

Joseph Feigelson and Ms Van Braningen were intent on dwelling on past issues and making accusations about TMNP and people involved with it.

Other members also expressed indignation about the request for a report.

"Submit early and give an ultimatum of a reply date of end of July," said Neil van der Spy. "You can't negotiate with SANParks, they're not negotiable."

Jo Hanekom, who was attending his first UFP meeting, was disturbed by the lack of cohesion in the group — "after all, we want the same thing," he said.

UFP secretary Denis le Jeune had difficulty keeping order but finally a decision was made to submit the same proposal that had been submitted in December 2006, which UFP now calls the "Wilson proposal", after forester Angus Wilson.

The "last-minute beauty contest meeting," said Mr Le Jeune, was apparently organised by the department of water affairs and forests (DWAF) and the department of environmental affairs and tourism (DEAT). Others in attendance were SANParks administrative head Paul Daphne and TMNP representatives.

TMNP CEO Brett Myrdal, asked the UFP to provide the park with a proposal.

Mr Le Jeune and Mr Segall were initially not interested in "attending another meeting," but did.

"The situation has improved dramatically," said Mr Le Jeune. "The most important message received from TMNP is that, 'things are not written in stone' and that some pines could be replanted," he said.

Eventually, UFP members decided unanimously to update the Wilson Report and to add addenda, but to submit it before the August 31 deadline.

One of the points frequently raised in the UFPG proposal is that plantations form part of the heritage of Cape Town.

Included are the Tokai Arboretum, and the avenue of Cork Oaks, *Quercus suber*, from Constantia Nek to Cecilia forest car park, part of the original Rhodes Drive. Another single tree is the karri gum, *Eucalyptus diversicola*, on a higher slope and adjacent to Rhodes Drive.

In March, Mayor Helen Zille received a petition from a wide range of Capetonians asking her to take a position on the management of Cecilia and Tokai and then advise the park.

She convened a group and set up a round-table discussion on the future of the plantations. A document produced by the group to inform Ms Zille of the issues said the park had undertaken a "sound" process in drawing up management proposals for Cecilia and Tokai and the City supported the "general principles and vision" of these.

- There were no minutes from the previous meeting and no financial statement but Ms Van Braningen was appointed to the board.

How it all started

Regular visitors to the museum at the top of Table Mountain will remember when the Back Table Was a forest of pines, as well as the slopes of Constantiaberg, above the East Fort in Hout Bay.

However, in 2006 there was a public outcry when, Mountain to Oceans (MTO) was awarded the tender, by the government, to clear the Tokai and Cecilia pine plantations bordering the TMNP.

The agreement was that once cleared, over 20 years, the land would fall under the management of SANParks, and therefore TMNP, and would be left to restore to fynbos.

These users of the plantations were concerned at the proposed felling, with no plan to replant the pines, as had been done in the past. To gauge the support for the retaining of the plantations, a petition was made available to users and a website set up.

Response, out of a population of almost three million Capetonians, was that more than 1 500 people opposed the felling of the pines. This minority was sufficient to give the group legal status. They became a Section 21 company and registered as UFP, with eight directors.

The main concern of the UFP is why the government changed its mind after Forestry Minister Ronnie Kasrils said in March 2003 that forestry operations would be managed by a Safcol's "special purpose vehicle company", MTO.

UFP said they do not see it as a "plantations versus fynbos" issue and they feel there is room for both. Tokai was recognised by a Botanical Society study as one of the core conservation sites on the Cape Flats. According to IUCN criteria, species can be downgraded from extinct in the wild only after they have survived for three generations, which will be three fire cycles or about 30 to 40 years at Tokai.

Karen Watkins, Constantiaberg Bulletin (19 July 2007)

Untitled

Many people do not seem to research before they write letters and make silly points.

The forest on Table Mountain National Park has not decreased (except where plantation has taken its place), it's the plantation that's decreasing and I urge you not to mistake plantation for forest. All that is happening is the natural veld is being restored to what it was before.

People may think that the purpose of a 'national park' is the same as a park with swings. This is not so: it is there to conserve our wildlife, not alien trees. It's not just there for making money (although some seem to think so) or just for people to have fun in. Although I encourage people to enjoy nature and have fun in the national parks, but that is not their sole purpose.

Of course fynbos will die out eventually for whatever reason, but this does not mean we should say "bugger this, let's just destroy it now".

Remember, it's not just a plant called fynbos that you will destroy, it's hundreds of species of plants not to mention all the animal life that occurs in it. Most of the plants are also on the verge of extinction. Are you just going to chuck this away?

The life in these plantations is next to nothing when compared with the natural vegetation. Yes, there are squirrels and chaffinches, which are aliens anyway, and birds of prey roosting in the pine trees, most of which didn't occur there in the first place and have extended their distribution range. Those that have occurred there were plantations and there is no reason why they can't now.

The reason baboons come down to the suburbs is to get food right? Perhaps it's because the pine plantations take up the land that could be their feeding ground. It's because there's not enough fynbos to provide food for them, that baboons are a problem.

Many people refer to the pine and gum trees as if they are sacred mainly because they are giant and old. Yes, some may be older than you, but if you look anywhere at natural fynbos, you will see small insignificant bushes that are hundreds of years old; it doesn't matter to these people that some are 10 times older than the pine trees.

There is no problem of running out of oxygen if all the plants died tonight; people could survive on the oxygen we have today for over 1 000 years. And it's not just like trees only generate oxygen; all plants do, including fynbos.

If you call our natural vegetation 'semi-desert, wind-blown and desolate', I'm afraid you can't have much respect for it. I advise you to go and live somewhere where pine forests occur naturally. If you want to stop real deforestation do something about the Amazon forest which is natural.

(Letter shortened)

Alex Rebelo, Bergvliet High School (21 June 2007)

Personal view

Regarding the letter ("Protect Fynbos", Bulletin, June 21), I omitted "Grade 9" before Bergvliet High School.

It was my personal view, not the view of Bergvliet High School.

Alex Rebelo, Bergvliet (19 July 2007)

Publicity needed for endangered plants

Congratulations to Karen Watkins on her article ("Endangered plants — seeds survive pines and fires", Bulletin, July 5) concerning endangered Peninsula plants. The more publicity given to the regeneration

of these plants the better. However, her photo of *serruria glomerata* was obviously taken recently and does not show the plant in all its beauty, as it will only flower in a month or two.

Here are two of my photos, one of a single plant with numerous flowerheads, and the other a close-up of a single flowerhead showing multiple headlets with 20-40 flowers on each, taken in the Tokai Lower Plantation in about 1993.

After the fire in 1998 the *Serruria glomerata* plants seeded prolifically, as did the *Diastella proteoides* (about nine of these plants had been rediscovered in that area in 1996).

Sibyl Morris, Bergvliet (12 July 2007)

Air both sides of pine debate

I have to ask how it is that you or Karen Watkins consider your article factual if you choose to emphasise your bias on issues you are covering? ("Protest over pine harvesting", Bulletin, June 21).

Ms Watkins did not bother to interview the organisers of our small protest. It was organised by Speak Out SA, established by Samantha Eaton and me to make an attempt, however small, to raise public awareness about the situation.

Our aim is to wake people from their apathy and to at least give their opinion, whichever side they support, on something that will affect them and future generations.

We are not fundamentalists: we are asking for the transparency that SANParks is obligated by law to follow through on – transparency beyond a small, concerned group, to the public at large. Their avoidance of this is leading to sinister theories about their methods and motivation.

We are calling for balance. We believe in the preservation of alien vegetation and its established ecosystems, as a long-standing and valued part of our heritage.

We also ask for integration, replanting and renewal of the once prolific indigenous forests that grew on the mountain. These should replace the pine plantations that have already been taken down and processed with astounding efficiency and seemingly way ahead of the promised schedule.

As far as we know, there is no plan to replant trees, which seems absurd in an environment of global warming. As taxpaying South African citizens, we believe in the fundamental right to choose what is right for us and to move away from dictatorship, which, in this situation and so many others in this country, is allowed to live and breath (sic) as a product of apathy.

Tamsin MacCarthy, Speak Out SA (5 July 2007)

Untitled

I think Karen Watkins has done a remarkably good job in representing the numerous and dissenting voices.

The issue is highly emotive and tends to have too much subjectivity – everyone believes (and probably rightly so) that they have a vested interest.

To her credit, Karen has written an article which aims to present, in a non-judgemental and balanced way, many of the views.

It is a highly emotive subject but it is right that the media continues to try to present all the views. To date the public's only real means of being heard has been through the media and, as such, any balanced reporting is to be welcomed.

Nicky Schmidt, Constantia (5 July 2007)

Untitled

In Karen Watkins' informative feature, she refers to me as chairman of Botanical Society of SA (BotSoc), which is true. However, I must clarify that my views on the plantations versus fynbos issue are my own and are not those of BotSoc.

The point Karen makes — that plantations occupy only about 2% of the TMNP, and that to many Capetonians they provide areas of important amenity, historical and aesthetic value — is critical.

And the point that is being repeated more often now is that the majority of Capetonians have not been adequately consulted over the removal of plantations to reestablish fynbos, which is the wont of SANParks and a handful of fynbos fanatics.

Yes, many of these plantations are unfortunately on areas once covered by Sand Plain and granite fynbos, but so then are most of the urban areas of Cape Town. Yet no one is suggesting that we expropriate dwellings in Bishopscourt/Constantia (granite) and Rondebosch/Tokai/ Kirstenhof/Grassy Park so we can bulldoze them to reestablish these now rare and endangered fynbos types.

Capetonians should also know that there are large areas in Orange Kloof, and above the formal gardens in Kirstenbosch, where granite fynbos could be encouraged to return if these areas were burned every 10-40 years.

However, because modern people do not understand the vitally important ecological role of fire, and there is a perception that Afromontane Forest must be conserved at every cost, these potential granite fynbos sites are going over to forest.

Historically these now forested areas were fynbos, and the forest patches were much more restricted to the deeper kloofs (personal observations in the early 1970s, and aerial photographs from the 1940s).

In the past there was a sharp edge to the forest-fynbos contact zone. A major management concern of mine is that if we do fell all the plantations for fynbos, will SANParks be allowed to burn this fynbos on the urban edge? Currently there is great opposition to SANParks burning small areas of fynbos that are not even adjacent to the urban edge!

On the other side of the "fence" there is the Urban Forest Protection Group (UFGP) who want even more of the TMNP made over to plantations; this because in SA we have a growing scarcity of good timber.

The timber industry is labour intensive and the water run-off from the eastern slopes of the mountain is not used for human consumption thus the arguments of the UFGP have some validity. Also the lands they believe should carry commercial plantations are Mountain Fynbos areas – this vegetation type covers most of the Cape Flora Kingdom and is some 90% intact.

It is my contention that this whole matter has been poorly conceived and badly managed, and I applaud the efforts of Mayor Zille to bring some rationality to the debate.

My main concern at this stage is that while the interested and affected parties are arguing, the money needed for the control of aggressive aliens like Black Wattle on Devil's Peak is also being withheld.

Eugene Moll, Kirstenhof (5 July 2007)

Recreational areas to stay

The current recreational areas in Tokai and Cecilia plantations will stay. This is what Mike Slayen, conservation and planning manager for Table Mountain National Park (TMNP), told the Bulletin this week at the SANParks head office in Westlake.

"The recreational areas will remain," said Mr Slayen. "And horse riding, mountain biking, hiking and dog-walking will continue."

Corridors of trees would be left, as well as other shade areas, including the Tokai Arboretum.

Mr Slayen agreed to give the Bulletin an exclusive interview before the open day at Chrysalis Academy until 7pm today, Thursday December 6.

This invitation to the public is the culmination of a management framework process which began in 1997 when the government and City of Cape Town established a national park in the Cape Peninsula Protected Natural Environment, which includes Tokai and Cecilia plantations.

On the other side of the fence are the scientists who see the need to protect the dwindling areas of Cape Flats sand fynbos and the South Peninsula granite fynbos.

Both of these biomes are becoming rare due to urban spread. Each area supports species which do not occur on the upper area of TMNP in the nutrient-poor Sandstone Fynbos.

Evidence of this can be seen to the east of Orpen Road where pines have been cleared where seedbanks have survived many years of harvesting ("Endangered plants' seeds survive pines and fires," Bulletin, July 5).

These plants include the critically endangered Cape Flats silkipuff *Diastella proteoides*, the cluster spiderhead *Serruria glomerata* which was thought to be extinct, and the acacia-leaf cone bush *Leucadendron macowanii* which flowered this year for the first time in the Constantia Valley in 150 years.

In February 2005 the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) assigned the management of Tokai and Cecilia plantations to TMNP. This was after the government decided, in 2000, not to continue with commercial plantations countrywide.

In 2006, TMNP produced a management framework for the future rehabilitation and use of the plantations. It then called on the public and interested and affected parties to identify and express opinions on the plantations, little knowing the emotional response this would cause.

On one side of the debate are the "tree huggers" — the Urban Forest Protection group (UFP) formed as a result of a petition signed by 1 500 people who opposed the harvesting of the pines.

The Bulletin has reported on a number of meetings held during the past year. The first ("Protest over pine harvesting", June 21) was attended by DWAF, the Department of Environment and Tourism, SANParks and UFP — the Bulletin reporter was not allowed to attend but reported on the meeting.

At the annual meeting UFP ("Park needles pine protectors", July 19), the UFP's attorney, Jack Segall, claimed that the organisation had been "shafted" by TMNP. They decided to update a report that had already been submitted to TMNP in December 2006 and resubmit it.

The most recent meeting was held in August and facilitated by Professor Richard Fuggle of UCT environmental studies. Biodiversity, recreational and heritage stakeholders were involved in a process to review the draft management framework. This revised proposal was presented to the City of Cape Town, DWAF and DEAT in October and will now be presented to the public today and on Saturday.

TMNP invite the public to view the exciting, innovative ideas that have come from SANParks and stakeholders.

- Public information sessions of the revised management framework for Tokai and Cecilia plantations:
- Today, Thursday December 6 until 7pm, at Chrysalis Academy, Porter Estate, Tokai.
- Saturday December 8, from 10am to 2pm, at Edith Stephens Wetland Park, Lansdowne Road, Manenberg.

Karen Watkins, Constantiaberg Bulletin (6 December 2007)

Water project aims to draw wildlife to wetlands

For the past few weeks Working for Wetlands, part of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) have been creating a canal and two weirs to slow the volume of water from the Keyser River and other streams.

The site is at the bottom of Lismore Avenue and bordered by the M3 and the Tokai Plantation.

The restoration of the original seasonal wetland will spread the flow of water in order to bring about the wetland which once occurred in the area.

"This will encourage wildlife to return, such as otters, the endangered Leopard Toad and birdlife," said Christine Mdunyelwa, who is head contractor with Working for Water. Every winter this section of the Keyser River floods causing walkers to either wade through the water or find an alternative route. When the earthworks have been completed the workers will plant indigenous vegetation which occurs naturally next to wetland areas, like cyperius, a stove grass which grows to 2m, rushes juncus, and Arum Lilly Zantedeschia aethiopica.

"It would be good to get rid of the Buffalo grass," said Christine, "but there's so much of it."

- World Water Day is on Saturday March 22.

Karen Watkins, Constantiaberg Bulletin (20 March 2008)

Snakes in forest

A number of puff adders have been sighted in Tokai Plantation over the past two weeks, and while users are nervous, scientists are happy.

"These sightings are great news," said Tony Rebelo of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (Sanbi) who is an advisor to the restoration area at Tokai Plantation.

"It means the wildlife is returning to the area and the restoration is a success. I look forward to more sightings of animals, including otters and mongeese, although some of these will unfortunately eat the snakes, but then that is what ecology is all about - living together in harmony," said Dr Rebelo.

"However, I'm aware that they're dangerous. I don't want to be bitten by one, any more than being spiked by a porcupine or bitten by a dog."

Lynn de Keller of Sweet Valley said a group of riders had seen a puff adder in their path on Thursday November 20.

In another incident Elaine Harrison had a run-in with a puff adder on Friday November 21. She was walking her three dogs and leading a child on a pony when the dogs ran over what looked like a branch on the path.

She was just behind them and saw it move and realised that it was a puff adder. She got such a fright that she ended up having seven stitches after she caught her face on a barbed wire fence surrounding the rehabilitated fynbos.

Mrs Harrison has since learned that puff adders have been introduced into the forest to curb a rat problem. "Is someone quite insane," said Mrs Harrison.

Chris Botes senior section ranger: Tokai and Cecilia with Table Mountain National Park, said when snakes are found on people's property it is better for the snake, people and pets for the snake to be taken away and released.

"But these reptiles are very fuzzy (sic) about their environment and do not necessarily stay where they're released. They'll decide for themselves where they want to hunt and hang around," said Mr Botes.

"Many puff adders and cobras were released during the last decade above the Tokai Arboretum and we didn't have any noticeable increase in snake sightings in that area. If there are too many disturbances around them they will simply move on," he said.

"It's also a fact that— for some unknown reason — there have been many more snake sightings reported to me this year than during the last 15 years. Thus the sightings reported in the lower Tokai section might be from this natural phenomenon and not necessarily from the puff adders, cobra and mole snake that were released from August in that section."

Dr Rebelo said it is standard practice for snakes caught in urban areas to be released in the nearest nature reserve or national park.

"It's also important to remember that snakes occur there naturally. For genetic integrity purposes, no snakes released to date in lower Tokai were caught from more than one kilometre away – that's the distance they can travel in a day.

"Every nature reserve accepts snakes caught in gardens in the vicinity. The alternative is to kill the snakes, which is undesirable as they perform useful ecosystem functions," he said.

"Puff adders like wet areas, and it's possible that with the late rains they may well be still out and about and not have retreated to the wetter areas, such as the Soetvlei wetlands, as they normally do."

Dr Rebelo has spent days monitoring Fynbos recovery and clearing aliens at Tokai.

He has seen mole snakes, porcupine, Cape fox and the spoor of otters and remains of caracal prey. He has been "told" by baboons to move along and go elsewhere, but he has yet to see a puff adder.

"I look forward to meeting one soon," he said.

Karen Watkins, Constantiaberg Bulletin (22 November 2008)

Remove alien plants with care

The statement by Rick Leibrandt in his letter to the Bulletin, that "The diversity of the natural world should be respected..." is quite correct ("Bird story gets tongue wagging," Bulletin, July 31). The assertion that "The fanatics that destroy trees they class as 'water guzzlers' ..." is however, misguided.

Removing alien tree species is not promoted by wild-eyed, axe-wielding or mindless 'fanatics'.

The concept of alien eradication is the result of scientific studies over many decades, which discovered that by removing indigenous species and replacing with aliens has destroyed the natural ecology.

Just as scientific studies revealed that smoking is detrimental to health and that simple lack of cleanliness or hygiene was responsible for the spread of many diseases.

With our increased ecological knowledge, we now have to respect nature and remove aliens and replant with tree types that grew here originally. This must be done sensibly and carefully, not indiscriminately.

By planting next to, around or among aliens and gradually trimming, pruning and removing them, a return to nature's ecological balance can be started.

Patrick O'Brien, Wynberg (23 November 2008)

Molesnakes could have done the job

Besides the unfortunate Mrs Harrison, who injured herself in her haste to avoid a puff adder ("Snakes in forest". Bulletin November 7), I have heard of three other people who have had near-misses in the past fortnight while walking in Tokai.

Up to now.

Now we have to watch wherever we put our feet and just pray our dogs don't tangle with one of these snakes.

No doubt when a child or a dog is bitten, as they almost certainly will be, the Parks Board official responsible for this will just defend himself by saying snakes occur naturally.

Of course they do, but I've been walking in the Tokai Forest for 30 years and up to now have never seen a snake: mole, cobra or puff adder.

I'm sure no one would agree that keeping a bit of veldt free of moles is worth a child's life, or that of a pet.

Chris Botes, a senior section ranger says "for some unknown reason many more snake sightings have been reported to me in the past year."

Perhaps no one told him that the Parks Board released a batch of puff adders and cobras in Tokai during August?

Their reason?

They wanted to get rid of moles and rats in the fynbos they planted.

Mole snakes would do the job just as well and are no threat to anyone.

Why didn't they just release these?

I'm sorry, but anyone who sanctioned the release of these extremely poisonous snakes must be criminally insane.

This is a designated recreational area where people and their children and dogs run freely.

It might be a good idea to contact your vet and make sure he has stock of anti-venom for puff adder bite.

Don't bother with taking your small dog though, it will be dead before you reach your car.

Ginny Swart (8 December 2008)

Tokai wetlands too wet for walkers

Busy with birds and frogs and popular with dog-walkers, cyclists, joggers and even a motorbike, the area near the bridge going nowhere is a popular place for locals. But some Tokai residents have complained about unable to walk there because the path has been flooded.

The Keyzers River Path is at the bottom of Lismore Avenue and is bordered by the M3 and part of the Tokai Plantation.

Mandy Noffke was involved in the initial design phase earlier this year ("Water project in Tokai aims to draw wildlife to wetland", Bulletin March 20) with Working for Wetlands on the M3 Wetland Flooding Project. The river was in effect draining the old wetland area and this project was aimed at recreating a portion of functioning wetland again.

While some people complain others are happy that the area has returned to its original status as a wetland. Debbie Cox of Kirstenhof recalled that the area was flooded in July.

"The water came over my gumboots, the dogs had to swim and my son Godfrey, 10, thought it was lots of fun." she said.

Florence Everitt of Tokai said she has been walking in the area for five years. "I'm pleased that the area is flooded as long as it is kept clean."

For a number of weeks Working for Wetlands, part of the South African National Biodiversity Institute (Sanbi) created a canal and two weirs in order to slow the volume of water from the Keyzers River and other streams.

"Every winter this section of the river would flood," said Ms Noffke. "This causes walkers to either wade through the water or find an alternative route."

George Davis, who is with the Urban Nature Programme at Sanbi said the intention was to recreate something similar to the original wetland that would then restore some of the original ecosystem function, both in terms of providing biodiversity habitat, and to serve functionally as a sponge that will attenuate flows, erosion and damage downstream.

"It would therefore encourage wildlife to return, such as otters, endangered Western Leopard Toad and birdlife," said Christine Mdunyelwa in March, the former head contractor with Working for Water.

"The fact that the area is still wet is more than we'd hoped for. It means the intervention is working well – as intended. We couldn't ascertain at exactly what levels the gabion weirs should be set at, so they'll need to be tweaked in order to create the optimum situation that balances recreational usage and biodiversity improvement."

Charles Cooper, media spokesperson for the city, said that the Roads and Stormwater Department have adjusted the gabions. Further adjustments can be made if this proves to be necessary. Stormwater pipes under the pathway have also been cleared to facilitate the movement of excess stormwater under the pathway, which is dry at present.

He said the situation will be monitored and additional measures will be taken to keep the path dry if this proves to be necessary next winter.

When asked about safety on the Keyzers River Path Mrs Cox said, "We walk with no 'bling' and carry very little. Also, we look très elegant," she said with a laugh, pointing at her very casual appearance.

Karen Watkins, Constantiaberg Bulletin (11 December 2008)

Burn fynbos, burn!

In "Understanding wildfires" (Bulletin, January 22) Rob Erasmus gives some interesting facts and tips regarding fire.

But he ignores two critical facts.

- Wildfires are natural. They have natural causes – such as rockfalls, lightning and human (yes, humans are part of our natural ecosystems).

Stopping wildfires is thus interfering with a natural process.

Yes, fires must be stopped when they threaten biodiversity, human resources and infrastructure.

But when fires occur in natural veld that is old enough to burn, then putting them out is illogical, unnatural and stupid.

Each year that Rob can claim to have limited fires to less than 100 hectares is a year in which fire fighters are postponing and exacerbating a problem with fynbos: namely that it will burn.

The older the veld and the larger the area of old veld, the greater the risk.

Sooner or later we will have another disastrous fire.

Already the veld burned in the 2000 fire is ready to burn.

Ecologically the veld is now nine years old and all the species have set seed, so there is no longer any need to put out any fires that start naturally from now on.

(Although we would like it to get to at least 15 years, on the basis that for an average fire return interval of 10-15 years, at least half the veld must get older).

The natural season is summer: the high danger season.

The Table Mountain National Park has a threshold of concern (a trigger for urgent management action) when less than half of the area burned over 15 years has burned during summer.

How does this management need tally with the claim that the Wildfire Services is stopping summer fires?

How will half the area burn in summer if Wildfire Services succeeds?

Clearly something is wrong here.

It seems that the only way the National Park will achieve its objectives is if Wildlife Services fails.

Is Wildfire Services the enemy of Fynbos?

It seems so! Is the future of biodiversity in the Peninsula in the hands of arsonists?

It seems so.

This is not an ideal recipe for conservation of our biodiversity.

- Fynbos burns.

The return time is 10 to 15 years – ranging mostly from five to 30 years.

The Peninsula contains about 22 000 ha of fynbos and renosterveld (those vegetation types that burn).

Under a natural regime of fire every 15 years, this means that on average every year some 1 600 ha must be burned to maintain this natural ecosystem process.

Only in 1975, 1986, 1991, 1994, 1999, 2000 and 2002 were these figures attained.

Even with the 2000 fires of 7 600 ha, the mean from 1975 is 1 300 ha burned a year.

This means that the National Park is falling behind schedule by 300 ha a year.

If Wildfire Services gets more efficient then this shortfall is going to increase.

It will look good on the books for Wildfire Services, but for us living in the shade of the mountain it means that the veld is getting older and the fuel load is increasing.

When the big fires come they will be spectacular conflagrations that no one on earth, including Wildfire Services, will be able to stop and protect us from.

In summary Wildfire Services is showing great short-term results.

But at the cost of a huge fire to come in the near future.

There is only one solution.

Instead of putting out fires in summer, Wildfire Services should be encouraging and managing them.

Wherever fires occur in veld that has reached an acceptable burn age, the fires should not be put out, but nurtured and allowed to perform their natural task.

These fires should be contained and limited to predetermined management blocks.

Where such wildfires do not reach the 1 600 ha required a year, block burns should be initiated and burned.

The ideal period to do these block burns is summer, but autumn block burns are still acceptable ecologically.

I personally will not feel safe until I see Wildfire Services using flame throwers to control wild fires.

Like our fire fighters did in the 1970s: fighting fire with fire.

Only then will Wildfire Services truly understand fire.

Tony Rebelo, Threatened Species Unit, South African National Biodiversity Institute, Kirstenbosch (29 June 2009)

Land is not owned by SANParks

I wish to comment on your front page article "Emotions run high at Watch meeting" (Bulletin, March 11).

In response to a question, whether the land on this plantations are being felled was earmarked for housing, two residents are quoted as saying that the land in question now "belongs to SANParks".

This is not true.

The land belongs to the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry.

SANParks has a 20-year lease to manage the land.

Only when the lease expires in 2025 (when all the trees have been harvested) will Tokai and Cecilia be incorporated into the park.

Since the land is at this stage neither owned by SANParks, nor being replanted for commercial forestry, the only factor that will save it from being developed, is the fact that botanists have declared the land (particularly lower Tokai) a biodiversity "hotspot".

However, with the ongoing housing crisis, will the present or future government really be motivated to put biodiversity first?

We now have several members of government who probably don't even know how to spell the word, let alone know or care what it means.

The government agreement of 2003, to preserve the popular plantation areas for high impact recreation, was reversed in 2005.

It is not at all inconceivable that current agreement be changed again and that the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry end up handing the land over to the Department of Housing.

So Shelley Lochnear's question, as to whether "the land is earmarked for low-cost housing", is perhaps not so ludicrous after all.

Sandra Hewitson, Tokai (18 March, 2010)

Untitled

I was so angry watching them cut down the trees in Tokai Forest last week.

When I took my dog for a walk, the attached poem came to my mind, verbatim.

Rape of Earth's Resources

Profanity! Sacrilege! Obscenity!

Tokai Forest reduced to stumps and woodcuts,
by foresters, lumberjacks and mindless labourers,
with their weapons of mass destruction,
petrol driven and hand saws, choppers and pangas,
equipment to make "men" of infants,
ignorant savages
raping, rending, defiling, pillaging,
intent on annihilation, wreckage, vast profit and greed.

Watched over by the tearful, all-seeing Elephant's Eye,

It sees rabid environmentalists, fixed on their righteous plan,
to cover this malediction,
humanity's insult to Mother Earth,
with fynbos, mere weeds, 'stead of noble oak, chestnut and pine.

Gone is the restful, cool swathe of peaceful, meditative walks,
replaced by neurotic, hyperactive, hectic scrub.

Soon to be ousted by desert sand, desolation and arid waste,
collaboration of vandalism, global warming, and southeaster winds.

Followed shortly by vultures in homo sapien guise,
the property developer,

avaricious locusts of urban landscape's demise, screeching
"Viva – low cost housing, high density homes for indigent, impoverished poor."

Turning verdant, pleasant, hallowed land,
into concrete, clay, tar and trash.

Extinguishing the vitality of flora, fauna, raptors, sparrows and bird song.

Further degradation and abuse of Mother Earth, Regal Gaia.

This benign living, breathing entity of infinite patience.

Until now!

Enough!

She has had her fill of delinquent children.

Juvenile megalomaniacs, voracious conglomerates, incarnated evil.

Who rape, murder, destroy, sinking deep shafts into her body, to steal.

Razing, burning, chopping, killing her precious, prized possessions.

She is striking back!

Creating earthquakes, tsunamis, floods, incessant snow,
frost, ice, insufferable heat and volcanoes too.

Intent on ridding her surface of a disease,
more dreadful than typhus, HIV, cancer, leprosy and dementia;
– Man, his cohort woman, and their vicious, ever increasing, "entitled" spawn.

More letters on page 13.

Lesley Cox, Tokai (18 March 2010)

Restoring God's creation

Poor Lesley Cox! (Land is not owned by SANParks", Bulletin letters, March 18). Does she not realise that Mother Earth, Regal Gaia, god and so forth do not care two hoots for pine plantations?

They are no better than wheat fields, sugar cane plantations, or urban houses; desecrations of mother nature. It is the loss of fynbos that they are lamenting. The loss of one of the most plant-species rich system on earth; a unique ecosystem in the Littlest Floral Kingdom. Thank heavens Table Mountain National Park has earmarked the area for restoration back to its pristine beauty.

All strength to the rabid environmentalists who want to restore God's creations, rather than cultivate sterile plantations of alien invasive weeds.

Tony Rebelo, Bergvliet (1 April 2010)

Pining for an answer

I have sat and read the Tokai Forest debate in the press now for several month now and can no longer allow Dr Tony Rebelo's unabridged arrogance to go unchallenged ("Restoring God's creation", Bulletin April 1).

Not only has he labelled opposing arguments as "stupid", and belittled others' concerns with terms such as "shame", he has now self-proclaimed himself as spokesman for both God and Mother Nature by stating the neither cares two hoots for pine plantations.

Let us accept that Dr Rebelo is highly qualified in his field.

This, however, does not endow him with any form of automatic moral authority on this matter or make his view in any way correct.

Whether he, or anybody else, likes it or not, there is a question that no-one (to my knowledge) has fully tested.

That is, why should the pine plantations be removed in favour of regenerating these endangered fynbos?

No doubt, just by asking this question, Dr Rebelo will be reaching for his oxygen mask and defibrillator. But it is the crux of the entire matter.

The obvious answer would seem to be that, under all circumstances, we must preserve all the unique biodiversity of Western Cape (sic).

In fact, Dr Rebelo has been quoted as saying that the extinction of some fynbos is an "unmitigated disaster".

His direct implication is that if we do not destroy the pine plantations and regenerate the Peninsula Granite fynbos, it will add to the "unmitigated disaster".

However, he gives no useful reason for this logic or who will be affected by such a disaster.

The fact is that we have all lived without these fynbos in the plantation area since the 1880s, when the Tokai plantations were first planted.

In the 120-odd years since that time, those plantations have provided tens of thousands of Cape Town residents and visitors with a peaceful sanctuary in which to walk and relax.

There is absolutely no evidence of a disaster during this time – unmitigated or otherwise.

I accept that the fynbos could not grow during this time but that does not automatically represent a disaster to most people – many of whom built in large areas of the city destroying much greater areas of this very fynbos.

It is very possible that Dr Rebelo's own house is on a plot previously covered in the now endangered fynbos.

But most would agree that it is highly desirable to retain the Western Cape's unique biodiversity – where it is reasonable – a very subjective matter: Ideally (in Dr Rebelo's vision) much of Cape Town should be leveled to allow all original areas of fynbos to flourish.

However, even Dr Rebelo recognises the impracticality of that ideal but, in doing so, he becomes and accessory to the debate as to which fynbos gets to stay or go.

And this brings us back to the pine plantations.

Whether Dr Rebelo likes it or not, many thousands of people love the pine forests in Tokai.

These people cannot simply be ignored by the views of his beloved "rabid environmentalists".

There is a totally fair and reasonable compromise to this, by removing the upper plantation to regenerate the fynbos, while keeping the lower plantation for the public.

There is both more quartzite rock and rain for the fynbos further up the mountain and, as someone who lives right next to the lower forest, if the fynbos is going to burn – as it needs to, I'd prefer it to burn further up the mountain and not near my house.

Dr Rebelo will no doubt wish to label this all as stupid.

He'd be entirely wrong about that. This is a fair and simple compromise that will give a win-win to all parties.

If Dr Rebelo wishes to keep arguing his point, he should maintain decorum and provide defensible arguments without the need to belittle others.

He is not the only one with a post-graduate degree from UCT.

Finally, Dr Rebelo should remember that God created both fynbos and pine trees, and nowhere in the Bible does it indicate God's preference.

Cliff Court, Tokai (8 April 2008)

Untitled

Having read Dr Rebelo's rant, I cannot help but reply.

The cutting down of all the pine trees in the forest is but an insult to the community and Cape Town's population.

With increasing population pressures, open recreational areas are becoming fewer and more widely spread.

Tokai Forest was one of the few areas where people can go for a walk and enjoy the space and now a group of fanatical botanists have gained the upper hand and are devastating the area.

They fail to see that the bird life in the forest is being destroyed as well.

Many owl nests have fallen to the chain saw and I have noticed several new species of bird in my garden since the cutting commenced.

The conservationists, in their infinite wisdom, introduced puff adders to control a burgeoning rodent population in their beloved fynbos.

Do they know that so far two dogs have been bitten outside of the fynbos area and certainly the puff adders are moving out of the fynbos and into the pines.

In case the conservationists are not aware, puff adders breed, and population growth will force them into areas where humans have activities. I hope the first person to be bitten launches a law suit against the owners of the land. I believe Dr Rebelo at some stage said the forest was only used by the "privileged few". Implying really, to hell with them.

Dr Rebelo, people come from all over the peninsula to enjoy the forest. Please don't make such general insulting statements unless you have some facts.

While I have problem with conservation, I have problem with the wholesale and total destruction of recreational space in the face of an ever increasing population and in the name of conservation.

I know there is a plan to plant indigenous trees but with the length of time that it takes these to grow, I think recreation in the ex-forest will be non-existent except for the fanatical botanists armed with their snake bite kits.

And do you know why we have trees in the Cape Peninsula? Because when the settlers originally landed here they found the landscape of fynbos shadeless and unpleasant.

They planted trees to make it a more pleasant environment.

The wheel is going full circle to the detriment of many.

Barry Jones, Tokai (8 April 2008)

It's the people's forest

Dr Tony Rebelo bemoans the fact that houses, wheat fields and pine plantations etc, are all aberrations of Mother Nature ("Restoring God's creation", Bulletin letters, April 1). Shame.

Which of course denies wheat fields, pine trees and sugar plantations their proper place in this world where they are indeed, indigenous, all of them growing wild at one stage.

Wake up Tony and smell the coffee.

Human beings have always manipulated the environment for their own benefit, ever since the beginning of their time on earth, and will continue to do so until the end of our time. It is why we are the most successful mammal currently occupying the planet.

Fynbos has not always existed, in what is now southern Africa, but has evolved over time as the continent slowly drifted to its current position, and will eventually evolve into something else, as our continent drifts further south.

Tony did make at least one true statement in his letter, in that Mother Earth, Regal Gaia and God do not give two hoots for pine plantations, or wheat fields, or sugar cane plantations, and presumably you also add fynbos to that list.

As I'm reasonably sure, that Mother Earth, Regal Gaia and God, are not terribly concerned about such matters.

But then Tony did go on to claim to be speaking for Mother Earth, Regal Gaia and God, by saying, that they actually lamented the loss of fynbos.

Can Tony really be claiming to be speaking for Mother Earth, Regal Gaia and God, and that he is now their voice in interpreting their will in this matter?

Ho Hum, pass the strait jacket someone.

I presume that, even a rabid environmentalist such as Tony, does occasionally feast on some of the produce that has enriched this beautiful country of ours, like grapes, fruit, vegetables, etc.

Many of which have been introduced into South Africa by migrants, and are by definition, products of alien invasive weeds, all grown in sterile plantations.

I also presume that Tony lives in a brick built house, with a nicely cultivated garden, laid to lawn, all of which but for his intervention, would be fynbos.

So come on Tony, get off your high horse, and stop preaching down to the rest of us with your holier than thou attitude, and stop treating those who simply oppose your view, as just too ignorant or ill informed, to understand what is going on.

Just admit that you have a simple personal agenda here, presumably for your personal aggrandisement, and you have pressed very hard to persuade a few others to your point of view, and that you will simply verbally slap down opportunity?

Who has the influence and money to smooth the way forward, what price your fynbos then? And please don't say that the thought has never ever crossed your mind, or that it just couldn't possibly happen. You're surely not that naive? There is in fact, a consensus that believes that this is actually the real "game plan". Anyway as a reward, they might just name a housing estate after you. I suggest the name "Rebelo's Folly".

Christopher Foad, Constantia (8 April 2010)

'We are pro compromise'

In support of the recent excellent letters I would like to say that I believe many people in the Tokai area are not necessarily pro pine, but pro compromise. We resent the patronising attitude of the TMNP.

We are aware of the problems caused by climate change and the need to avoid trees drawing too much ground water. However, we wish to enjoy the recreational amenity afforded by trees, which inspired us to live in Tokai in the first place. We have been told that areas of shade provided by indigenous trees will be established.

This would be acceptable but there is still no sign of it happening. Discussion and compromise are urgently required.

Jane Laing, Tokai (15 April 2010)

Trees should remain in the ground

I wholeheartedly agree with Christopher Foad of Constantia ("It's the people's forest", Bulletin letters, April 15). Dr Tony Rebelo is a dictator and has only one view – his own.

His vision for the Cape is a landscape covered in fynbos only. He wants to cut down all shady trees (oaks included) and leave a desolate, boring landscape. If you want to see his vision, take a trip to the Cape of Good Hope Nature Reserve – not a tree in sight.

The early settlers beautified the Cape by planting trees (mainly oaks) and now Dr Rebelo, in his so-called wisdom, wants to eradicate them. Shame on him – it is he who should go.

Paddy Greenacre, Constantia (22 April 2010)

Domino effect

I could not agree more with Mr P Greenacre ("Trees should remain in the ground", Bulletin letters, April 22).

I have walked my dogs for over 20 years in this forest and enjoyed place for the privileged few as Dr Rebelo suggests but a place for relaxation and enjoyment for all.

I don't understand how Dr Rebelo can consider himself as God's mouthpiece. ("God doesn't care two hoots about pine trees") I'm sure He cares for them and also for the wonderful, big oak trees which would have been killed on Dr Rebelo's orders. What about the owls, the numberless birds, not to forget the squirrels? As the pines go, they will be totally homeless. The large amount of rats could be dealt with by the owls much better than by poison. It is a great shame to murder this lovely quiet peace (sic) of nature which was a delight and joy for numerous people over the years. I wish Dr Rebelo would think a little deeper and have consideration for all the creatures tht live on and under the pine trees. There are furthermore a great number of unusual flowers to be admired in springtime, as I have experienced on a walking tour with botanically interested people.

Dr Carola Engelter, Lakeside (29 April 2010)

Untitled

In reply to Tony Rebelo's patronising letter; I would take issue on God not caring two hoots for pine trees – Mr Court and I agree that they are among God's creations, as indeed, is fynbos – which, unfortunately, my mindset defines as weeds. Perhaps Mr Rebelo can tell me if their output of oxygen is equivalent to the pine trees?

We are going to need all the oxygen we can get as the Blue Route are planning and extra 1 000 parking places – SANParks have just eliminated half of the Tokai green lung, and are adding to air pollution by burning the remains.

Then again we need to consider our present government – what are their plans for the future of the new fynbos areas, and can they be trusted?

LJ Cox, Tokai (29 April 2010)

TMNP, please clarify ...

In recent weeks speculation has been rife as to what will happen to the land on which the lower Tokai plantations are being felled. Fiona Chisholm's latest column ("Depressing to watch a forest vanish bit by bit", Bulletin May 6) highlights this once again. A few days after my own letter on the subject ("Land is not owned by SANParks", Bulletin March 18), in which I wrote that Tokai and Cecilia were owned by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (now Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries), and that SANParks had a 20-year lease to manage the land, I received a telephone call from Gavin Bell, head of the southern section of Table Mountain National Park (TMNP). He said that my statements were incorrect,

that the land had been assigned to SANParks in perpetuity and that there was no expiry date on the lease. I replied that I had obtained my information from various newspaper articles, which I quoted to him. He responded that one "can't believe everything that is published in the newspapers and that "reporters often get it wrong". Two days later Mr Bell telephoned me again to inform me that the issue of the assignment of the land to SANParks was in the Government Gazette.

Herewith some extracts from the Constantiaberg Bulletin, Thursday October 26 2006 (Staff Reporter):

"Table Mountain National Park has a 20-year lease to manage the 1000 ha which make up Cecilia and Tokai plantations, and MTO Forestry (Pty) Ltd, formerly Safcol, has the right to harvest the 600 ha of pines during this time. The lease excludes the replanting of trees for commercial harvesting. When the lease expires in 2025, Tokai and Cecilia will be incorporated into the park."

Further on in the report, Mike Slayen, operations manager for the park, is quoted: "The objective of the Cabinet in giving us this land on lease was to have it incorporated into the national park after the plantations had been harvested. Once that happens, the land is secured for posterity."

Other reports, in the Cape Times by Melanie Gosling (20/10/2006) and in the Cape Argus, by Murray Williams (19/10/2006), list very much the same information, which will take too long to quote in this space.

Have all these reporters misquoted information given to them? If these reports are indeed incorrect, why were they never refuted by SANParks at the time?

Also, as far as I know (and I stand to be corrected), an item or issue that has been gazetted, is an issue which still needs to be discussed and passed by Parliament, which means that the land in question has not yet been proclaimed as National Park land.

If the land is owned by the Department of Forestry, is on lease to SANParks for 20 years, and will be incorporated into the national park in 2025, after the plantations have been harvested, how has it, at the same time, been assigned to SANParks in perpetuity?

If the land will be only be (sic) "secured for posterity" once the plantations have been harvested, why is it incorrect to speculate that it could at this stage still be lost to housing?

Mr Bell, please will you clear up the confusion and speculation, by stating the facts in a public reply to the people in this area, who are directly affected by the actions of TMNP and its fanatical advisor Tony Rebelo.

At least then we'll know once and for all, whether sacrificing every last well-loved and sadly missed tree, will actually be worth anything.

Paddy Gordon, manager, Table Mountain National Park:

Despite rumours to the contrary, I wish to assure readers that the felling of the Tokai plantation trees will not open the door for urban development.

The land is protected by national legislation and cannot be used for urban development.

Firstly, Tokai and Cecilia plantations are still declared State Forests in terms of the National Forest Act (84 of 1998) and are therefore protected by legislation against inappropriate development.

Secondly, the management of Tokai and Cecilia areas were assigned in 2005 by the then Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry to SANParks to manage as part of the Table Mountain National Park.

The Government decision to phase out commercial plantations on the Peninsula included the provision for a private timber company, MTO Forestry to harvest the plantation over a 20-year lease period to 2024.

The assignment requires that, on release of the plantations as State forests, Tokai and Cecilia will be declared part of the National Park in terms of the National Environment Management: Protected Areas Act (31 of 2004).

The areas are being managed in terms of the Tokai and Cecilia Management Framework which provides for the biodiversity restoration of threatened fynbos vegetation types; ongoing recreational use by hikers, dog walkers, mountain bikers, horse riders etc; protection of heritage resources such as the Arboretum and for limited ecotourism use (eg picnic/braai site).

The future of Tokai and Cecilia is therefore secured within a protected area and will be managed in the interest of the public and not available for urban development purposes.

Sandra Hewitson, Tokai (23 May 2010)

Why was pines policy changed so abruptly?

Newspapers have published many letters and articles on the subject of the Tokai and Cecilia plantation forests, but we would like to respond to articles by Dr Tony Rebelo and Karen Watkins, whose main arguments for the permanent removal of 600ha of prime urban forest are:

- "Cape Flats sand fynbos is critically endangered." This is true, but this fynbos thrives only at low altitudes, well below the bulk of the plantation forests.
- "Plantations are sterile wastelands." This is a subjective view and ignores the feelings of thousands of Capetonians who love their pines and eucalyptus.
- "There's no room for compromise." We disagree, and so did the government two years ago when the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry spent considerable time examining the question, only to lose interest after political changes.

The real problem is that neither the government nor SANParks is prepared to explain why a policy of maintaining commercial plantation forests within Table Mountain National Park was abruptly reversed, without respecting any of the legal requirements in such matters.

Denis Le Jeune, Urban Forest Protection Group (Independent Newspapers, July 2010)

It's all systems go for fynbos growth

On July 8, my letter "Fanatical felling of trees and unmitigated disaster" was published about the felling of pines and the spread of alien Black Wattle near upper Cecilia Ravine.

I was subsequently invited by Gavin Bell, acting park manager of Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) to drive up to the lookout and area in question to point out my observation directly to him and Chris Botes TMNP Senior Sector Ranger for Tokai who accompanied us.

We met on July 14 and drove up the bridle path to the lookout in question.

As a result of their comments and observations it became clear that my letter was not based on correct facts and did not take into consideration the reasons for the ongoing work taking place on the mountain.

In the first place the "Black Wattle" turned out to be Keurboom saplings which to the informal enthusiast such as myself look fairly similar.

Keurboom is, of course, totally indigenous and once more mature, make for wonderful shade trees covered in pink/purple flowers at certain times of the year.

Secondly, the many pine saplings referred to above the path turned out on closer inspection to have been ring barked and therefore will die off as a result of this follow up clearing process which I learnt is carried out on a regular structured basis.

Finally, the many logs, branches and twigs lying around have in fact purposely be left in situ to help prevent erosion. I also learnt that over a period of time (10-15 years) all this "detritus" will have naturally broken down back into the soil and in the process will have imparted valuable nutrients into the soil.

The plantations taken down and at present still being worked on are being removed by MTO Forestry (Pty) Ltd and not TMNP and apparently are and have always been commercial plantations (not natural forests), that when deemed mature were always going to be harvested and the timber sold off. On the way down I was shown certain areas and paths where shade trees will be left on what are deemed "heritage" paths!

So I do indeed have some egg on my face and now have a better understanding of the work put in to ensure the healthy regeneration of fynbos which will include some shade replacement for the enjoyment of future generations!

I would like to thanks Gavin Bell and Chris Botes for taking the time to improve my understanding of the ongoing process. I found them to be most approachable and happy to deal directly with any similar concerns.

Brian Kirsch, Sea Point (Independent Newspapers, July 2010)

'I don't care what they say about me' – Get the facts straight about fynbos

There has been a lot said about me in the Constantia Bulletin over the last few weeks. I don't care what people think or say about me; if it helps them to get rid of some steam, then great. Many thanks for the entertaining reading. But I do care that some inaccuracies and "falsehoods" have been propagated about fynbos at Tokai, and these need to be addressed.

For those who don't know me, I love trees and have over 20 taller than 5m high in my modest garden, several alien to South Africa. I also have a fynbos patch,, and an alien lawn. Under appropriate circumstances any plant is a gem. And yes, my garden is in what used to be Cape Flats Sand Fynbos. Some of these species are growing there again, but I don't have any delusions that growing them will help the species: they are there for my enjoyment on those days that I cannot make it to our local nature reserves or Table Mountain National Park (TMNP).

Tokai was not considered to be of any conservation significance until a fire in 1998 revealed that a rich seed bank, including several threatened IUCN Red List species, was present for regeneration. A 1999 survey of Core Conservation areas rated Tokai as one of the top 20 sites for the conservation of threatened species representative of the Cape Flats. In the 2004 National Spatial Biodiversity Assessment, Cape Flats Sand Fynbos was identified as one of 24 Critically Endangered vegetation types in the country (eight of which occur in Cape Town). Given that South Africa ratified the Rio Convention which commits the country to conserve 10% of its area in representative ecosystems, this catapulted Tokai to the top priority conservation area on the Cape Peninsula. Consequently, the site was one of the priority areas handed over to TMNP in 2005.

Cliff Court ("Pining for an answer", Bulletin, April 8) asks why pines should be removed for fynbos. Simple: less than 1% of Cape Flats Sand Fynbos (CFSF) is conserved from the Rio target of 10% and South Africa's national conservation target of 30%. With only 14% of CFSF left, of which half is "good" condition habitat, each patch is crucial. Cliff also asserts that fynbos would be better observed up the mountain. Unfortunately, the fynbos on the mountain is not CFSF and so we cannot conserve it there: Tokai is the last place left to conserve this veld type as a viable natural ecosystem south of the N1.

Several people claim that removing the plantations and restoring fynbos is merely a step to urbanisation ("Depressing to watch a forest vanish bit by bit". Fiona Chisholm, Bulletin, May 6): Removing plantations results in urban development via eco-friendly development in fynbos; Christopher Foad (It's the people's forest", Bulletin, April 15): hardnosed developers seeing an opportunity and putting in a housing estate called "Rebelo's Folly").

They could not be further from the truth. Pine plantations have no protection from development at all. In fact, if it was not for the fynbos the area might have been assigned for subsidised housing. It was mainly the Critically Endangered CFSF and the Rio Convention that saved the area. More than that, the area is now a national park: the highest conservation protection available nationally: the area can only

be deproclaimed by a 60% vote in the national parliament. The existence of this recreation area – as fynbos rather than plantation – is all due to fynbos.

Cliff Court wrote that Tokai has had 120 years of recreation. This ignores the fact that even in the 1980s it was still illegal to venture into the area without a forestry permit: not many people used the plantations then.

Some ecology: Fynbos is dominated by fire. It was the 1998 fire that revealed the seed bank. Cliff Court suggests that I want much of Cape Town to be levelled to allow the original fynbos to flourish. This is not the case: at Tokai we have a seed bank: restoration is not a possibility elsewhere on the Cape Flats where seed banks have been destroyed.

Restoring fynbos in transformed areas means putting in hundreds of species and thousands of plants. Fynbos can have hundreds of bulbs a square metre (the record is 25 000 bulbs a square metre near Nieuwoudtville) – calculate the cost at R6 per bulb from a nursery. And that is just the bulbs. In fact, if we get plants from a nursery there will not be enough space to plant them all: we would have to wash away the soil from the roots to fit them in – the costs are really enormous.

There are cheaper ways of restoring fynbos: for instance by using seeds instead of plants. But there is very little seed left on the Cape Flats: the fynbos in the areas under houses is totally destroyed.

Seeds from other vegetation types will not do: it has to be CFSF. Thus, we can restore fynbos "for free" at Tokai, versus for many thousands of rands per hectare anywhere else.

There is really no other better option than Tokai: this is the very last chance.

Christopher Foad ("It's the people's forest", April 15) states that fynbos is determined by climate and has migrated and changed.

He is wrong – fynbos is determined by soil: Fynbos has been tied to the Cape Fold mountains for 110 million years at least. During that time it has changed drastically. Most of the species we know today are less than five million years old.

This is a little longer than some of the "cultural conservation" we value so much from the 350 years of European occupation of the peninsula. Given that fynbos occurs nowhere else on earth, it is especially special.

Barry Jones ("Pining for an answer", Bulletin April 8) was worried about the bird life in plantation being destroyed and puff adders introduced. This has been dealt with at length: no puff adders have been moved into the area – they were all in the area already. Regarding the birds: the owls are perfectly happy with fynbos and usually nest on the ground anyway. And most other birds in the plantations are alien to the peninsula and are usually happy in urban areas as well: hardly a high conservation priority compared to the many threatened IUCN Red List plant species (and probably animals as well, but we won't know until we restore the area and the animals return: although the endangered western leopard

toad is already present in the fynbos areas). Many more fynbos bird and animal species were deprived of a home when the plantations were planted: hopefully many will return.

Cliff Court (April 8) maintains that God created fynbos and pines without preference. That may be true, but he created 9 000 species of fynbos plants and put them in 0.06% of the earth's surface around Cape Town.

The 90 species of pines cover huge areas in North America, Europe and Asia. Pines can be conserved anywhere (they can for instance be planted in the Constantia Green Belt): we are already below the national and international targets for protecting CFSF.

Jane Laing ("We are pro compromise", April 29), like Cliff Court is pro compromise. What does this mean? Ecosystems cannot just be negotiated away. One can use a light motor vehicle as an analogy. How small can one make a car before people cannot fit inside it?

What use is a car that people cannot fit into? Tokai is the last available conservation area for many species of Cape Flats plants (600 species have been recorded from Bergvliet). Six species of plant known only from CFSF are already extinct: many more are on the verge of extinction. How many more must become extinct before we stop compromising and negotiating?

Perhaps Cliff would like to negotiate away parts as well. After all, four wheels is quite a lot – surely a car only needs two? And give away the headlights and windscreen wipers: one only needs them occasionally. How much compromising do we need before our ecosystem is no longer "roadworthy"? Only 14% of the veld type is left. Less than 1% of CFSF is conserved. The national conservation target for CFSF based on the area needed to conserve 70% of its species is 30%. We have a crisis, and still people insist on compromising the last remnants out of existence.

We need to conserve all the bits: the species, the different communities (wetlands, riverine systems, marshes, deep sands, etc). They are all essential (but not equally so) to keeping the ecosystem viable.

Research has shown that the smallest area to conserve fynbos in perpetuity is 600ha. This cannot be done at Tokai – the area of CFSF is too small, but we can solve this problem by linking it to the mountain ecosystems in the national park. The smallest area of any one community is 6ha, which can be done, provided it is embedded in other natural communities.

But the bottom line is that the area needs to be big enough to maintain viable populations of each of the threatened IUCN Red List plant species, and also the dominant keystone species. And then there are edge effects: the outer 20-100m of any patch are not able to maintain most species – we need core area for effective conservation. (Apologies, but elaborating these will require pages of explanations: consult the scientific literature or a specialist if you are seriously interested in exploring these details further). If we are serious about conserving this ecosystem we cannot negotiate any more: we have already negotiated away too much. There is also a major misconception that plantations are a type of forest. In terms of biodiversity conservation, plantations are barren deserts (with apologies to real deserts, which are often quite diverse). Studies at Tokai show that fynbos has a far, far richer fauna

(both in species and in numbers) than the plantations. Plantations are sterile wastelands compared to the riches of fynbos.

We do have lots of indigenous forest on the peninsula (and it is one of the richest of the world's temperate forest types, also containing a diverse animal life). But these forests are confined to fire-free kloofs in the fynbos biome, and have nothing to do with Tokai. All true forests have been nationally protected since 1888.

Cape Town is in an environmental crisis. We have more threatened species in Cape Town than most countries on earth. Some 10% of known extinct plant species on earth come from Cape Town. Is this something to be proud of? Is this a figure that we dare allow to increase? The phenomenon of "we support conservation, provided it is in the Amazon and not in our back yard," is well known. We need to ace the facts. We need to embrace our responsibility. We need to stop making species extinct and start seriously saving our threatened natural heritage. No one else can: not anyone anywhere else on earth can save Cape Flats Sand Fynbos. Nor can we leave it for our kids to do: if we don't do it now there won't be anything left for them to see or save. What gives us the right to decide that our kids don't need Cape Flats Sand Fynbos or any of its spectacular species?

For more information on our threatened ecosystems and species, please visit: www.capetown.gov.za.

- This article is endorsed by:

Clifford Dorse: Biodiversity Coordinator, Biodiversity Management Branch, City of Cape Town

Paddy Gordon: Park Manager, Table Mountain National Park

Rupert Koopman: Botanist, CapeNature

Dr Tony Rebelo, South African National Biodiversity Institute (15 July 2010)

Untitled

TMNP, please answer the questions

The regeneration of threatened fynbos types is certainly a laudable objective. We will be gaining a valuable biodiversity park. But in the process we are losing a valuable people's park and for many this has been difficult to accept. We have heard a summary of the botanical facts. Here is a summary of some other facts.

In 2003, there was an agreement between SANParks and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF), endorsed by DWAF Minister Ronnie Kasrils, that under SANParks' management, Tokai and Cecilia plantations would not be removed, but would be retained for continued use by the Cape Town community, and as part of Tokai and Cecilia's management plan. (The full press release may be viewed on the Water Affairs website under media room/press releases/2003/10 March 2003).

Mr Kasrils recognised that especially the older trees "create a unique environment of scenic beauty and tranquility within the city boundaries of Cape Town" and that the "plantations are "an outdoor refuge for thousands of nearby city dwellers". He recognised that although the plantations were planted for commercial reasons, once the public gained access to them they became hugely popular. They provided a place where people could roam freely under the trees, be it on foot, horseback or bike and families could picnic, run and play under the trees, sheltered from the wind or sun, unrestricted by pathways. It was Mr Kasrils' clear intention that under SANParks' management, Tokai and Cecilia plantations would become formalised as a park for the people.

With their decision in 2005 to permanently remove all the plantations, SANParks went back on this agreement, with a total disregard for the Cape Town community, who were not even informed. Certain government bodies decided that commercial forestry would be discontinued in the Cape Peninsula and the trees would be permanently removed over 20 years by the harvesting company MTO. Who made this decision? What was the reason for this decision, while there is actually a shortage of timber in this country, and timber prices have noticeably increased? It is highly unlikely that fynbos restoration was the primary motivating factor at the time.

When the park users found out, a large proportion of them were not in agreement. After and passionate and sometimes bitter debate that raged on in the press for months, representatives of the community entered into discussions with SANParks, whereby they proposed that certain sections of trees be retained for shaded recreation, in areas that would not affect the regeneration threatened fynbos types. By mid 2007 all discussion had proved 100% unsuccessful. All proposals from the community were rejected by SANParks. Today in Tokai, besides the arboretum (which is out of bounds to dog-walkers, cyclists and horse-riders), no trees are being spared, not even a few oaks, yellowwoods, or the more majestic pines along side of the road, some of which were at least 60 years old. For many this is a great loss.

Yes, ultimately pines were planted for financial gain, but it would be interesting to know whose gain. In 2007 I attended the Open Day held by Table Mountain National Park as part of their so-called Public Participation process. At this event I was told by TMNP that there was "little point in protesting as this was a 'done deal', the trees had already been sold, and money had already changed hands". Whose hands? To whom was the timber sold? It would be interesting to know where the countless truckloads of timber end up. The timber from Tokai and Cecilia is of a high quality and would most likely fetch a good price. So secondly and more importantly, who received, or is receiving the profits?

When I asked TMNP these questions recently in an open letter ("Losing trees should be for a worthy cause", Bulletin, May 27), they were ignored. So I asked them again, in a personal email (Monday June 7), but again I received no answer. One starts to wonder why these questions remain consistently ignored and unanswered. TMNP, please will you respond?

- **Merle Collins, South African National Parks (SANParks)**

We acknowledge that seeing one's surrounding landscape change may be upsetting, however Table Mountain National Park is operating within the boundaries of the Tokai Cecilia Management Framework

which had no less than four rounds of public process. This includes public and stakeholder input to identify the issues (2006); public and stakeholder comments on the draft Management Framework (March 2007); the Mayor's stakeholder Roundtable discussion and a review process facilitated by Professor Fuggle to produce an agreed Framework (October 2007), and a public presentation of the final Management Framework (December 2007).

In this process, public and stakeholders were given an opportunity to register, letters were sent to all those who registered, media notices were placed, public open days, meetings and workshops held. Public and stakeholders were given full opportunity to comment and participate in the process and all issues raised were responded to as reflected in the various reports.

Where there once was a landscape of singular plant species (pines/gums), we will be able to enjoy hundreds of plants species in the same area. Botanical surveys have positively established that there are indigenous seed banks present in Tokai and at least 328 indigenous species have already been recorded including sand and granite fynbos especially in the areas which have been cleared of pine plantations and burned. Research indicates that this number could increase to almost 600 species over the next few years. Furthermore, in the small lower Tokai Diastilla patch burned in 2007, another 109 species have been recorded and some 18 Red Data List species have currently been regenerated in Tokai. The evidence proves that the restoration project is in no danger of failing, instead it has exceeded most expectations.

The yellowwoods that were cleared (*Podocarpus falcatus*) are extremely invasive and pose a threat to the local fynbos and indigenous forests by one competing indigenous species. The pines surrounding these yellowwoods were being felled and the yellowwoods would have destroyed/damaged during this operation. Any remaining yellowwoods would have blown over during the winter storms (these trees were unstable as they grew thin long trunks in the sheltered environment of the pines and were top heavy). Furthermore the area is being restored to the endangered granite fynbos and the yellowwoods would not have survived a fynbos fire. The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) issued a permit for the removal of these trees after a site inspection by a DAFF official.

The remaining issues raised by Ms Hewitson were addressed in the Tokai and Cecilia public process in 2006/7/8 and all were responded to then as reflected in both the "Tokai Cecilia Management Framework: Issues and Responses" report (September 22, 2006) and the Tokai Cecilia Management Framework: Comments and Responses report (March 23, 2007) which were made available to the public at the time.

The decision to phase out commercial plantations on the Peninsula, the sale of the timber and the media release issued by the then Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry in 2003, were responded to as follows: "The sale of the standing timber by public tender and the subsequent MTO lease was put in place by Department of Water Affairs and Forestry as part of its process of exiting from the commercial plantations. The 20-year lease period was negotiated by Minister of Environment Affairs and Tourism and the Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry. SANParks was then assigned the lease in terms of the Cabinet resolution of 1997 that all public land within the Cape Peninsula Protected Natural Environment

(CPPNE), a declared nature area, be brought under the management of SANParks to establish the CPPNE National Park".

In so doing, SANParks abided by the decision by both ministers that the plantations be phased out over 20 years as per the conditions of the lease.

Furthermore, it was acknowledged at the time that, "The special 'exit strategy' for Tokai and Cecilia underpinning the lease was also complied and implemented by DWAF and not SANParks and the Management Framework is not in a position to challenge this strategy."

Feedback from MTO indicates that the timber is destined for the local market and the 99% of the timber is going to Cape Saw Mills in Stellenbosch, while the rest is going to Woodline Timber Industries in Kuils River.

It should be noted that only plantation trees and specific invasive trees are being removed in Tokai and Cecilia. Many other trees (including oaks and gums) are being retained in specific areas as per the Management Framework to provide shade for recreational users.

Furthermore, non-invasive and certain indigenous trees will be planted to enhance shade opportunities.

We trust that we have adequately addressed Ms Hewitson's concerns. A copy of the Tokai/Cecilia Management Framework is available on our website www.tmnp.co.za.

Sandra Hewitson, Tokai (22 July 2010)

Love them or hate them, the pines have to go

SANParks, or Table Mountain National Park (TMNP) are poor at communicating with the public about the plantations. Maybe that is why some users of the pine plantations do not understand why they are being removed. It is an emotive issue and many are trying to undermine the engineers of the Tokai and Cecilia Management Framework Plan of 2005 to 2025, arguing with trained conservationists and scientists like Dr Tony Rebelo of the South African National Biodiversity Institute.

People had the opportunity to register at the public open day in December 2007. I wonder if they did, or if they are aware of the future plans, to preserve endangered vegetation types and water and improving recreation facilities. Plantations are sterile wastelands compared to the rich diversity of fynbos. After all, we live in the richest floral kingdom in the world.

And anyway, the pines are sick! They have pine blight, a worldwide phenomenon which is killing huge stands of pines. And there is the Sirex wood wasp where a wasp bores into the young pine growth, lays an egg and puts in a wad of fungus which is then eaten away by the wasp.

I say the pines must go! They were removed on the Back Table in the 1980s; they were removed from Silvermine after the 'big fire' of 2000. Not only are we safeguarding 1 000ha from being used for

subsidised housing but there are many exciting plans in store. One of them is the Source to Sea project – as long as funding is used on the trail and not vehicles and excessive salaries.

There are many misconceptions about the plantations at Tokai and Cecilia.

Firstly, that TMNP are to blame for cutting down the pines. They aren't. They were planted by SAFCOL, now Mountains to Oceans (MTO). Pine plantations are harvested for roof timbers, furniture, paper – for financial gain – there's nothing wrong with that. And considering that the public are not allowed to walk in most plantations and if SAFCOL had not allowed people to walk in Tokai and Cecilia without permits, there would be no dispute.

Then there's the perception that all fynbos is the same. This is not so. Fynbos is determined by soil. The Cape Flats Sand Fynbos (CFSF) used to be the most common vegetation type but is now one of 21 "critically endangered" vegetation types in the country. It needs to be preserved.

Higher up the slopes is the "endangered" Granite Fynbos which occurs on far richer soil. Much of it has been lost to vineyards. It is found where there are outcrops of granite and stands of silvertrees (*Leucadendron argenteum*), examples are Lion's Head and above Price Drive.

Another misconception is that all the pines will be cut down in Tokai and Cecilia. SANParks are spending millions on rehabilitating the area, planting indigenous trees along improved pathways and some pines will remain.

Another issue that many people do not consider is the City's prediction of running out of water by 2030. With the average pine tree said to "drink" 100 litres a day compared to about 75 litres for the equivalent area of fynbos, can we afford to keep them? We need water to be absorbed into the underground channels to feed boreholes for our European-style gardens. Pines and plantations have no place on the peninsula.

Some complain that fynbos does not provide shade. Interesting considering that TMNP officials have received complaints that there is "too much shade" around Silvermine dam. This after the pines, which once surrounded the dam, were removed to allow fynbos to return. Go there and see what can be expected in just a few short years in Tokai and Cecilia.

My concerns are for the baboons, the run-off from heavy rainfall and the follow-up of alien clearing. Historically the four baboon troops at Tokai have roosted in the pines and fed on pine nuts. What now, after the plantation is gone? I would like to see the City impose (and enforce) by-laws around waste management and security for people living near TMNP. And they need to improve on soil loss prevention and erosion, as seen on Devil's Peak. As for alien clearing, TMNP and the City need a strict programme, and funding.

The clearing of pines is not new. The Back Table was once covered in pines. About a year ago, while ascending Constantia Corner on a hot day, I gasped when I saw that pines had been felled. No more shade.

Having hiked there many times it was on the descent that we noticed the geological Cape Folding on Vlakkenberg.

No wonder, because the pines had blocked the view. More recently, driving along Orpen Road after the pines had been felled, I could see the Elephant's Eye.

Not long afterwards, the area was burnt to regenerate the seed banks stored in the soil since the pines were planted in Tokai in 1895 (and Cecilia in 1903).

TMNP will be planting trees in the next few weeks and invite the community to join them. In the meantime, why not take up your sunscreen, hat, bird/insect/plant books and camera and go exploring. Look around and maybe you will discover a plant which was thought to be extinct.

Or ask Dr Rebelo to take you for a walk where you will see things and learn things you never dreamt of. Happy hunting!

- Reporter Karen Watkins is a hiker and amateur botanist.

Karen Watkins, Constantiaberg Bulletin (15 July 2010)

Untitled

The position adopted (and enforced) by TMNP is that of a relentless crusade bordering on fanaticism.

Capetonians have for the last 100 years living perfectly well with some imperfections and the absence of fynbos in these areas. Clearly the pines are considered a given treasure and nobody in the public has been having sleepless nights for reason of some imbalance and the lack of fynbos in areas so beautifully established with trees. Resurrection of fynbos indeed has been the least important issue in the general public and nobody would dream of bringing this to the fore and allocate large sums of money for it.

The point has been made that fynbos depends upon (self-ignited) fires for propagation and that such episodes would endanger areas close to human habitation. The 25% lower water requirement of fynbos also cannot justify the urgency of its introduction as the water savings are marginal (and enormous amounts of Table Mountain water continue to go unharnessed anyway). In the face of costs and the proven recreational benefits of the original commercial plan for these forests. While the terrain at present looks barren this action has opened up amazing vistas of the mountains.

However, these cleared areas, it seems, are now going to be sealed off from the public and from the regulars who have walked there for years.

All pedestrian entrances to the area on the west side of Spaanschemat Road have been closed up and I was informed by a TMNP official, while taking my dog for a walk in this area, that I was not allowed to walk there as they were starting a planting programme to reestablish the indigenous plants in this area.

It really is a great pity that the TMNP appears unwilling to work towards the reestablishment of the fynbos in the peninsula while accommodating the public's wish to enjoy the natural beauties of our mountain slopes and the Cape Flats.

This sure is the unique inheritance of the people of Cape Town.

The TMNP, it seems, is intent on appropriating these areas for themselves. Surely the mandate of the TMNP and associated organisations, as trustees of the Park, should include not only the reestablishment and protection of the natural vegetation of these areas, but also that this be done for the benefit and enjoyment of the public.

Perhaps these areas are going to be turned into the private and exclusive domain of our scientific purists where on moonlight nights they can gather to cast their spells and utter their botanic incantations.

Would some well demarcated paths and some shady spots in this and other areas, where the public could walk, see and enjoy the recovery of the vegetation not add to their value?

At least then we could all participate in and support this renewal project and be party to protecting this heritage.

[...]

The arguments for the radical removal of pines smack of a arrogant mission to bring home to the general public that they need to wake up to some finer point of superior habitat management. In fact the arguments for the radical removal of pines in Cecilia and Tokai forest are untenable.

This crusade is an unpleasant reminder of our national past which liked to rule by decree and not by democratic mechanisms. This issue should be kept in abeyance and revisited.

Dr Lothar Bohm, Pinelands (22 July 2010)