



**BALULE NATURE RESERVE**  
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5 September 2023.

Dear Grietjie Landowners,

### **Hunting Incident 3 September 2023 Maseke / Grietjie**

Following the incident on Sunday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 2023 and the vigorous debate on the WhatsApp chat, I have compiled the response below for your information. There are 2 issues at hand here, the incident itself and then a general debate on the emotive topic of hunting in the Open System. These are 2 separate issues and will be dealt with separately. Various accusations have also been leveled at the management of Maseke Game Reserve, a region within Balule Nature Reserve (BNR), the same Greater Limpopo Transfronteir Conservation Area Reserve (GLTFCA) in which Grietjie is located.

As a signatory to the GLTFCA Co-operative Agreement, Balule Nature Reserve and all its member regions have adopted and implemented the agreed protocols set out by the Joint Management Committee. This includes the Greater Kruger Hunting Protocol which was developed and endorsed by all signatories including South African National Parks (SANParks), Limpopo Economic Development, Environment and Tourism (LEDET) and Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA).

Our annual animal off-takes are determined by the Associated Private Nature Reserves (APNR) ecological panel (after the annual game census) and reviewed and then endorsed by SANParks and LEDET biodiversity. The off-take recommendation includes species such as elephant, buffalo, impala, waterbuck, kudu etc. Some BNR regions hunt commercially while some others merely take their ecological quota such as impala and kudu.

I will deal with the incident first and then the appropriate protocols that are in place for sustainable resource use in the Open System. I will include certain items directly from the hunting report received from the Reserve Representative in charge of the hunt.

#### **1. Summary of the incident**

- At 11:15 a suitable elephant bull as prescribed by the Greater Kruger Hunting Protocol, and per the permit issued by LEDET, was identified by the hunting party. The party consisted of the client, the professional hunter (PH), the reserve representative (RR) and a backup.
- The client took the shot and immediately the RR could see that the placement was off. As is required by the protocol, the RR and PH immediately fired subsequent shots to bring the elephant down. These shots were not effective in bringing the elephant down.

- The elephant was followed on foot and when RR determined that it was heading toward the Grietjie region, and a helicopter was dispatched to assist. The deputy head warden arrived with the chopper and the search commenced.
- The elephant was located inside the neighboring Grietjie region. The elephant was driven back to Maseke where it was dispatched as per the regulations of the protocol.
- Grietjie landowners near the incident phoned Grietjie Security Manager Jason Nel who communicated reports of the incident real-time to Grietjie Management and provided a response via WhatsApp Grietjie owners group.
- Maseke were within their rights to hunt on any area of their property as long as it is safe to do so. They border numerous non-hunting regions, and the shots will often be audible for areas that do not hunt. Their property is long and narrow. The suggestion that they should not do it near to our borders is not practical, as that could then exclude most of their property as none of their neighbours are hunting regions. This could impact the correct selection of the elephant within the terms of the permit and protocol.
- Specific Grietjie landowners near the incident continued to post on WhatsApp after speaking via phone with Grietjie Security and receiving responses from Grietjie management on WhatsApp owners' group.
- An apology was received from the Maseke Reserve Representative on the same day for the disruption caused to our landowners and residents.

## 2. Protocol compliance

Some landowners and residents of Grietjie near the incident voiced concerns about the number of shots and that a helicopter was used to drive the elephant back to Maseke to protect Grietjie residents and property. Claims and or concerns were aired that this was unprofessional and may indeed be a violation of either legislation or protocol.

The Greater Kruger Hunting protocol which was developed by the GLTFCA Reserves and the SANParks head of sustainable use states: ***"If the animal does not immediately fall to the initial brain shot the Professional Hunter and Reserve Representative shall both immediately put in a heart/ lung shot and then while the wounded elephant is still visible shall continue to fire further back-up shots, either lung, brain or disabling shots, as is most suitable."***

It states further that:

***"An aircraft may be used to locate a wounded animal if other ground based efforts have failed or on the discretion of the Reserve Representative."***

The Maseke Reserve Representative conducted the hunt in accordance with the requirements and protocols. The incident stemmed from an initial shot made by the client which failed to bring the elephant down. Hunting is never an exact science and no matter how many targets a client shoots at before the hunt, there is never any guarantee that he will make the perfect

shot when faced with the real thing. The nature of a hunt is unpredictable and this is not a reflection on the capabilities of the Maseke Reserve Representative.

There was a range of shots fired while the animal was visible (we understand 5 shots) and then 3 at the end after the elephant had been driven into Maseke. This is requirement as stated in the protocol below:

***“A coup de grace shot will be done at all times to conclude the hunt.”***

### **Additional Protocol information**

Every single animal hunted is measured, tusks weighed, and the jaw bones are photographed for aging purposes. At the end of the year, a panel sits with representatives from all the GLTFCA Reserves, LEDET and the Kruger/SANParks and reviews every single animal shot in that year. The panel makes the final decision on whether an animal is within the protocol or not, not the GLTFCA reserve concerned. In the past 4 years BNR has achieved a 98% compliance.

The protocol details the various categories of animals that can be hunted based on various factors such as age, class etc. The major factor when it comes to elephant categories is to remove bulls that have low genetic value. Kruger sampled 600 elephant bulls to achieve a graph that determines what would be an “average” elephant in terms of genetic value and tusk size. All classes hunted must fall **below** this average line. Approximately 50 below average elephants are removed from the APNR Reserves on an annual basis. This is to allow for better breeding opportunities for the average and above average bulls. Heavy fines and punitive measures are imposed if any animals hunted exceeds the tusk weight and is under the minimum age set for that class.

We also have a strict policy in accordance with the GLTFCA Co-operative Agreement to report where the annual hunting revenue is spent. This income can only be spent on conservation, wildlife security and community upliftment. Therefore, the sentiment about people merely profiteering off the consumption of these animals is not true.

Maseke is permitted to take off 12 elephants per year. Their allocation is legally acquired as is all the other BNR regions. BNR will not tolerate any illegal hunting / poaching of any kind.

All meat from animals hunted on Maseke is given to the community children and old age members at the community drop off centre. Some 252 children are fed with this meat.

### **Sustainable resource use debate**

Many of the comments did not relate to this specific incident but to the hunting of animals in general, and more specifically elephants. That is a separate debate and Balule and the APNR reserves have adopted this practice for many years and will continue to allow regions that wish to make use of this practice to do so. The off-takes are an ecologically sound management strategy and allow for predominantly wilderness areas that have minimal landowners the opportunity to bring in revenue to fund their conservation and security expenses. Sustainable resource use is recognised in the constitution of the country and permitted in terms of the GLTFCA Co-operative Agreement. I have attached some slides from a presentation on Sustainable Resource Management prepared by Mr Richard Sowrey of SANParks for your information.

In Summary:

1. The Hunt was legal.
2. No GLTFCA Protocol violations were committed.
3. Pursuit and follow up were consistent with the Protocol requirements.

We do understand that this incident was upsetting to some and was not an ideal situation. This is an exceptional situation and was dealt with correctly by the Maseke Reserve Rep and his team. Communication via WhatsApp groups is not always possible during an emergency.

Please direct any further queries to me at [gm@balulenr.co.za](mailto:gm@balulenr.co.za)

Regards,



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Ian Nowak – GM Balule Nature Reserve