

Media Release - 21 July 2000

Bovine Tuberculosis Containment Strategy for the Kruger National Park

A survey to determine the prevalence of Bovine Tuberculosis (BTB) within the buffalo population in the Kruger National Park was conducted in 1998. The results indicated BTB occurs at high prevalence in the southern region of the Kruger Park (42% infection), at moderate prevalence in the Central region (21% infection), and very low prevalence in the area north of the Olifants River (1,5% infection). At present buffalo are the only known maintenance host of BTB in the Kruger Park.

Following this survey a number of workshops were held to devise a strategy to deal with this alien disease problem. The outcome was the BTB containment strategy that the SANP Directorate approved last year. Before this strategy could be implemented the SANP had to get the approval of the Directorate of Veterinary Services who have the responsibility of animal disease control at a national level. A meeting was held with the Directorate of Veterinary Services earlier this year where their inputs and acceptance of the proposed strategy was obtained

The aim of the BTB containment strategy is to keep the northern half of the Kruger Park free of BTB until more knowledge is gained on the impact of this disease on biodiversity, or until suitable vaccines become available. At present it is not considered feasible in the short term to eradicate this disease from the Kruger Park due to the large area infected ($\pm 10,000 \text{ km}^2$) and the large number of potential host animals in this area. The current BTB prevalence north of the Olifants River is very low and only three infected buffalo herds have been identified in this area to date. The containment strategy entails the systematic testing of every buffalo herd in the northern Kruger Park and the removal of all BTB positive animals (the so called Test & Remove method). The following actions are planned:

- All buffalo herds north of the Olifants River will be marked by radio-collaring individuals to make each herd positively identifiable, and in order to locate them for testing.
- A sample of 20-30 buffalo from each herd will be tested annually for at least five years.
- Each tested buffalo will be marked.
- Buffalo that test negative for BTB will be released back into their herds.
- Every buffalo that tests positive for BTB will be euthanased and examined. It is expected that this number would be low, since the BTB prevalence in the north is still very low.
- The results of the blood tests of the sampled buffalo will be available within 30 hours, due to the assistance of a field diagnostic laboratory.
- Continued research is being done to determine the impact of BTB on animal populations such as lions, and on the development of suitable vaccines.

Even if some positive herds are missed in the first year using this technique, they are likely to be picked up in subsequent annual surveys. The objective is to limit the overall prevalence of BTB in the buffalo population of the northern Kruger Park to below its current level. This particular technique is similar to the techniques used to eradicate BTB from domestic cattle in South Africa (and many other countries in the world) over a period of two or three decades. A pilot project using similar Test and Remove of positive buffalo in some highly infected herds in the southern Kruger Park will also be evaluated.

This BTB containment exercise will be very expensive with costs for the first year estimated at about R960,000. Donor funding is sought to help fund this important disease containment programme. Persons wishing to make a contribution can donate funds into the following account:

KNP Animal Tuberculosis Project, ABSA Bank, Sunnyside, Account # 40-4973-3185.

Queries should be directed to Mr William Mabasa (Manager: Public Relations and Communications) at 013 735 5611 during office hours.

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