

REF: GKL/KNP/05-03

29 May 2009

Media Statement

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Proposed Malelane "Hotel" in Kruger National Park Set To Have Less Environmental Impact than Rest Camps

South African National Parks [SANParks] has called for proposals in respect of Public Private Partnership projects for the proposed Malelane Hotel development in the Kruger National Park [KNP]. The proposed development is set to provide a full service in the park that is different from the existing rest camps and also to improve KNP's standing in terms of a competitive tourism market. The new development is with the approved KNP Management Plan and the Commercialization Strategy which has already delivered 7 concession Lodges in the KNP.

SANParks is primarily focussed on biodiversity conservation and is dependent on government funding to perform the environmental public good. With government priorities being focussed on providing health services, education, municipal service-delivery, housing and other pressing needs, conservation grant funding is static and diminishing in real terms. SANParks has, over the past few years, supplemented the shortfall in funding through its successful ecotourism business without deviating from its core mandate. As such, SANParks needs to continually keep abreast with the top tourist destinations by improving its product and appealing to a wider range of visitors in the 21st Century. The inbound tourism market and the emerging middle class have repeatedly demanded a product that provides a full service in addition to the safari experience without "Dysnification of the park".

The KNP currently offers self-catering facilities throughout the park which are hugely popular but fall short in meeting the expectations of the current generation who want the safari experience without the self-catering bit. The proposed "hotel" will be a full-service facility that will be constructed on the periphery of the park at the Malelane Gate Precinct. Dr David Mabunda, Chief Executive of SANParks said that this was in line with the peripheral development policy which allow for development on the periphery of the park rather than within the park where there will be a greater ecological impact. The geographical location of the facility will make it accessible for 24 hours and eliminate the undesirable risk associated with late arrivals driving to the nearest camp.

The 200 bed facility is not going to be a high-rise building in the mould of the general perception of a hotel with the "bells and whistles" of a city hotel but a development in line with the hall-mark SANParks environmental ambience that will compliment its surroundings. It will provide full meals, laundry services as well as regular tours through the park. There will be no demarcated traversing area for the hotel as is the case with the luxury lodges. "This "hotel", which is what we are calling it for want of a better word, will have a much smaller footprint in the park as compared to the existing camps that have from 300 up to 600 beds," said Dr Mabunda. He also emphasized the fact that guest to the hotel will not be driving in the park as guests of the camps do, they will be offered a "park-and-ride" service at regular intervals with their vehicles parked off. "So

instead of having a typical N1 Highway traffic congestion with at least two occupants driving through the park, we will have these cars neatly tucked away and fill up existing park game drive vehicles which are running at 50% occupancy to enhance the gameviewing experience in the most appropriate style and help towards reducing the menace of traffic on the park's roads," he explained

The proposed facility will not be built on pristine land, because the area identified for the development is an old road construction camp and a quarry , but SANParks, has specified in its call for proposals that the required EIA's must be conducted. " We had to design the concept and provide specifications first before weighing its possible impacts on the ecology. All applicable environmental scrutiny will be applied independently and we are confident that all EIA's will reflect its ecological feasibility. Its impact will definitely be far less than the sprawling towns of Skukuza and Satara. Who knows this might be the beginning of a new era – the camps in the core of the park moving to the periphery by 2059?" concluded Dr. Mabunda.

Issued by SANParks Corporate Communications