Background information and species management guidelines

NAMIBIA’S VISION
To expand the elephant range and enhance the role of wildlife as a land use by promoting linkages and co-management between State Protected Areas and conservancies on communal and private land.

GOAL
To carry the maximum number of elephants in Namibia consistent with the conservation of biological diversity and the wishes of stakeholders with elephant on their land.

OBJECTIVES
1. Reduce conflict between elephants and people
2. Ensure that elephants are a benefit to people
3. Secure the biodiversity and ensure the elephant population is sustainable

SOCIAL
ECOLOGICAL
Achieve the full economic potential of elephants

ECONOMIC

OBJECTIVES

LONGITUDENJ
Elephants are usually assumed to live for 60 years, but it is more likely that they survive beyond 50 years.

Gestation period
22 months

Seasonal breeding
Most populations have a breeding peak during the rains but there may occur in any month of the year.

Age at first conception
The median age is about 10 years but in good conditions some cows may conceive as early as 4 years old.

Breeding lifetime
Cows continue breeding throughout their lives.

Feasibility
Cows can be expected to produce a calf every 4 years.

Age-specific mortality
Mortality in 19711 for juveniles, decreasing to about 0.5% at 2 years of age and remaining at 0.5% up to 40 years. Mortality increases progressively as animals approach age. Mortality in 20-25 year old males is higher than females.

Sex ratio
Close to 1:1 in an unimpeded population.

Density dependence
Under environmental stress, mortality increases affecting juveniles more than adults, age at first pregnancy may be delayed until as late as 15 years and eventually may decrease to one calf every 6 years.

With these parameters and a stable age structure, populations will increase at 4.5% per year - doubling in about 16 years.

NUMBERS AND DISTRIBUTION
The Namibian elephant population suffered a massive decline in the late 19th century through extensive hunting for ivory. The last herd in the Etosha pan area was exterminated in 1881 and by 1934 elephants were limited to the Kaokoveld and the Caprivi. Elephants reappeared in Etosha in the 1950s.

The north-western population is increasing at about 3.3% per year and is now over 4,000 animals. The elephants in Etosha (2,500) are part of this population and move in and out of the National Park. The north-eastern population now exceeds 1,800. The recent increases are caused by immigration from northern Botswana and north-western Zimbabwe.

RECOMMENDED MANAGEMENT
In the north-west, the elephant population can be allowed to continue expanding its present range and management can be limited to trophy hunting.

In the north-east the density should not exceed 0.5/km². Management should be aimed at reducing predator animal control and illegal hunting.

It would be highly desirable for the countries sharing the elephant range to develop a common management approach for elephants. Without such an agreement, Namibia must manage its elephants in the best interests of the Namibian people and its concerns for the conservation of biological diversity.

They are having a marked impact on habitats, particularly in the north-east. The relationship between elephants and their habitats is cyclical: elephant numbers increase causing trees to decline; elephant populations then crash, allowing trees to recover. There is no simple recipe for management which will maintain biological diversity and, simultaneously, large elephant populations.