

The expected impact of the new Game Ranching Policy for Botswana on CBNRM

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The Game Ranching Policy for Botswana (you can download a copy in PDF format on the news page of <http://www.cbnrm.bw>) was recently adopted by Parliament. The policy shows the support of Government for this industry and it is expected that the "Game Ranching Regulations" (probably in place towards the end of this year) will give far-reaching proprietorship over wildlife to the landholder. In other words, contrary to the practice today, the game farmer will own his game just as a cattle rancher owns his stock. This means that the game farmer can sell (crop or hunt) his game on his terms without asking permission (asking for a quota or buying a licence) from DWNP.

Under the new policy, game ranching will become a secure and financially attractive investment opportunity (looking at the examples set in Namibia and South Africa) and we are bound to see more leasehold and freehold farms moving away from livestock production to wildlife production.

In December 2001 an interesting and useful report was published from Bruce Mead (ULG Consultants) on the "Economic Analysis of Commercial Consumptive Use of Wildlife in Botswana" (you can download a copy in PDF format on the news page of <http://www.cbnrm.bw>). The Botswana Wildlife Management Association (BWMA) commissioned the study. Amongst other things, the potential merging of the hunting industry and game ranching is described, as well as the anticipated impact on CBNRM. What follows below is derived from this report:

In the surrounding countries (South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia) there is a close economic association between safari outfitters and game ranchers, and in many cases the same individuals and companies are involved in both sectors. In many southern African countries, there has been a dramatic conversion of cattle range into game ranches in drier areas (for economic reasons), and this has precipitated a change in the structure of their hunting industries. One consequence of this is a change to the value system used to calculate trophy fees for different species.

In most cases, the charismatic species and dangerous game are taken on state or community land, and the plains game (antelopes) are taken on private ranch lands. The charismatic species are used primarily to attract the hunters to the country, and often only small margins (or in some cases no margins) are made on these species. This is partly because the license fees to the state or to the community are high, and partly because competition amongst operators is fierce. Once the clients are in the country, the dangerous game is hunted at low margin and the high margins are generated on the ranch lands, where the cost structure is different and animals hunted attract no license fees from central government or royalties to communities.

The attraction for hunters to come to Botswana is a combination of a) the quality of the trophies, b) the standard of ethics associated with the hunt and c) the premium

associated with hunting in unfenced, open country. The attraction provided by dangerous game and charismatic species will continue in Botswana, and a premium will still be paid for hunting good quality trophies.

The future for the plains game component in Botswana however will change with game ranching. If the wildlife resource becomes the property of the landowner, as expected, and the requirement for paying licenses to the Department of Wildlife falls away, there are a number of possible consequences for CBNRM. These will especially apply to the low wildlife value (plains game only) areas in Kgalagadi, Ghanzi, Kweneng and western Ngamiland:

- The hunting of plains game in community areas of the country will suffer. There is no reason why outfitters will pay (dramatically increased in 2002) license fees, on top of royalties to the District Council and payments to communities, for game which they can hunt on ranches with non of these costs;
- Hunting will be cheaper to conduct from ranch land than from concession land (especially in remote areas). The cost of support logistics alone (in addition to the above direct costs) will favour hunting on ranch land;
- Conversely, the boost to the game ranch industry from changes in legislation may be significant. Investment in quality infrastructure on long-lease ranch land or freehold ranch land is more likely than on short-lease state or community land; and
- Communities in remote areas stand to lose the most. The expected increase of plains game hunting at game ranches, hard on the heels of the lion hunting ban, will ensure that wildlife ceases to be a viable land use option for large areas in drier and more remote parts of the country (ULG, 2001).

The consequences of the Game Ranch Policy might go further than the viability of CBNRM alone. Large tracts of land in western Botswana are zoned as Wildlife Management Area. These areas were zoned, amongst other reasons, for viable wildlife utilisation. Rezoning WMAs into livestock grazing areas “might” become a “more economically viable” land use option. The future of the WMAs, especially the non-gazetted ones in Kgalagadi and Kweneng districts, is in jeopardy, with potential negative consequences for wildlife in western Botswana.

With the expected threat to the economic viability of wildlife utilisation in the community areas in western Botswana (commercial hunting is the mainstay of the community trusts at present) it is necessary to explore more vigorously the alternative uses of the WMAs, and as such alternative sources of income for communities involved in CBNRM. Within the short to medium term this will not be easy:

- Tourism development in western Botswana will take a long time, enormous investments and marketing efforts to generate substantial employment and incomes at community level;
- Veld products and other natural resources use are important for community subsistence purposes but are unlikely to generate substantial employment and incomes in the short-term;
- The “traditional” and subsistence values of these areas are important for the residents but to what extent the national and district Government will accept this land use argument is unclear.

This means that the community trusts in Kweneng (KW 2 and 6), Ghanzi (GH 1, 3, 10 and 11) and Kgalagadi (KD 1, 2, 12 and 15) and to a lesser extent the (prospective) trusts in western Ngamiland will find it increasingly difficult to sustain their operations, to develop their organisational capacity and to prove a reason for existence to their community residents and other stakeholders. Decreasing donor funding in Botswana will compound the expected financial constraints. The community trusts in western Botswana have so far never been financially independent but the potential to become viable and contribute to their own development while sustaining natural resources in a fragile environment, looks even more limited if commercial hunting falls away as a substantial source of income.

Innovative and strategic thinking is required to alleviate the impact of the expected changes in the hunting industry if CBNRM (and wildlife) is to survive in the Kalahari.