



A Summary of

A Status Report on Nature's Valley, Surrounding Communities and Adjacent Areas



1961



1990

The *Status Report on Nature's Valley, Surrounding Communities and Adjacent Areas* is published by the Nature's Valley Trust for the information of all stakeholders in Nature's Valley and the surrounding area. The intention is to inform people of the current state of affairs with regard to ecological issues and authority structures, and to suggest opportunities and a way forward for community based participation in order to secure the environmental integrity of the area.

January 2002

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Why We Have Chosen The Brenton Blue Butterfly As A Logo For The Status Report

The Brenton Blue butterfly (*Orachrysops niobe*) was discovered near Knysna in 1858. It was thought to be extinct until 1977, when Dr Jonathan Ball, a butterfly expert and longstanding Nature's Valley enthusiast, rediscovered it on the Fynbos Reserve and adjacent stands. In 1979 Dr. Ball discovered a second colony at Brenton-on-Sea. There were no further sightings of the butterfly in Nature's Valley from 1984 onward and it was assumed this colony was extinct and that Brenton-on-Sea was the last remaining stronghold. In 1993 the Brenton breeding colony was threatened by a new housing development. An alliance of conservation NGO's launched a four-year campaign to stop the destruction of the butterfly's habitat. The campaign invoked previously unused and untested legislation to halt the commercial development of the butterfly habitat and has resulted in the declaration of the Brenton Blue Butterfly Reserve.

Dave Edge, a Brenton Blue expert, has commented that the disappearance of the butterfly in Nature's Valley may be due to lack of suitable habitat. The pupae of the Brenton Blue can remain buried underground for years, emerging only when breeding conditions related to its specific habitat are right. Dr Ball believes that if the Fynbos Reserve and surrounding vegetation in the township could be managed to optimise conditions needed to support the butterfly, it may be possible for Nature's Valley to once again support a population of Brenton Blue butterflies. The value of a second breeding colony of the Brenton Blue would make a significant contribution in keeping a species from the brink of extinction and serve as an indicator species as to the health of the Nature's Valley ecosystem.

We normally think of nature's flagship species as spectacular creatures like elephants and whales. This small butterfly however, symbolises an unprecedented and inspiring collective effort to save a species from the brink of extinction and is an appropriate symbol of the effort required to secure the environmental future of Nature's Valley.

The full length *Status Report* is a 150-page document, consisting of 5 chapters and 12 Appendices. It is available in hardcopy or electronically via e-mail. The printed version is sold at cost (± R75) and the e-mail version will be sent to you on request.

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Introduction

Nature's Valley lies on one of the most valuable and rapidly developing stretches of South Africa's coastline. Despite being surrounded by the Tsitsikamma National Park and having limited remaining stands on which to build, Nature's Valley remains vulnerable to exploitation. Applications to rezone, informal business activities, proposed development projects and land claims in close proximity to Nature's Valley, are evidence of development pressure.

The Nature's Valley Trust

In December 2000 a group of Nature's Valley families launched a community initiative whose goal was to contribute to maintaining the environmental integrity of Nature's Valley and the surrounding area. They proposed that a Nature's Valley Trust (NVTrust) be established to focus on conservation issues and that an in-depth *Status Report* be commissioned to identify all issues which may affect Nature's Valley. Prof Sue Milton, Lindy Rodwell and Geoff McIlleron agreed to become Trustees and to nurture the NVTrust through the first year of its existence.

The Mission of the NVTrust is:

“To maintain the long term environmental integrity of Nature's Valley and surrounds by becoming proactively involved in issues that impact on the future of the area ”.

Thanks to generous funding from 31 families and individuals, the Trust has largely managed to accomplish the milestones set for 2001. We have maintained a fulltime researcher, published three newsletters and set up a comprehensive database. There is widespread awareness of the NVTrust and significant interest from other organizations to engage with the Trust. (Coordinated action with other organizations will be crucial to future efforts of the Trust). The foundations have been laid for a constructive relationship with the Nature's Valley Ratepayers Association (NVRAssociation). Our most significant milestone has been the publication of *A Status Report on Nature's Valley, Adjacent Communities and Surrounding Areas*.

The *Status Report* focuses on Nature's Valley, but encompasses a larger area which includes the Tsitsikamma National Park, the De Vasselot Reserve and Buitenverwachting Contractual Park, the catchment areas of the Groot and the Salt Rivers and the settlements of Nature's Valley, The Craggs and Covie.

Covie, and to a lesser extent the Kurland community, have been researched and included in the report. Historically, Covie and Nature's Valley have had an intimate association. Both communities are surrounded by National Park and share common concerns. This, together with the pending Covie land claim, Covie's close proximity (walking distance to Nature's Valley), and the fact that the majority of Covie residents find employment in Nature's Valley, or with SANParks or Forestry, are fundamental reasons for the inclusion of Covie in this report.

A History of Conservation Effort

Chapter 2 of the *Status Report* provides a rich portrayal of the wildlife and vegetation of the area as well as a fascinating history of Nature's Valley, Covie, The Craggs and Salt River.

The highlight of this chapter is the description of the continuous effort that has been made to protect Nature's Valley over the past 40 years – largely due to the efforts of a few dedicated people.

- In the early 1960's residents effectively lobbied to stop the construction of a scenic road along the coastal escarpment and across the Nature's Valley dunes.
- During that same decade, Hugh van Hasselt and Henry Lyell, then Chairman of the Nature's Valley Council, managed to stop the Department of Post and Telegraphs from building a holiday resort for its employees, in the forested area to the west of the present shop.
- In the early 1970's a road was constructed on the eastern side of the estuary. Dr Robinson intervened and halted intended construction beyond the mouth, into an area that provided habitat for '*Peripatopsis*', a rare missing link in the evolutionary history of the Arthropods.
- Efforts to develop a low-lying flood plain in the estuary known as "Die Eiland" were opposed over a period that spanned 30 years. Energetic lobbying resulted in a government-gazetted decision to prohibit development on this fragile site. The property was expropriated and the land donated to National Parks.
- By 1983 the Nature's Valley council had successfully moved against the development of the former hotel site for high-density housing.
- In 1985 representation was made by Nature's Valley residents to ensure that with the impending introduction of national grid power in December 1986, all electrical infrastructure should be installed with sensitivity to aesthetics and the environment.
- During the last decade clearly visible high voltage power lines from Plettenberg Bay were moved out of sight below the forest canopy.
- Following this, MTM and Vodacom were persuaded to move and camouflage a highly obtrusive signal mast.
- In 2001 unsightly telephone lines have been removed from the estuary area adjacent to the R102.
- Careful planning, a generous donation and volunteer efforts have resulted in Nature's Valley having two open areas which showcase the botanical features of the province, namely the Fynbos Reserve and the Phyl Martin Park
- Consistent efforts by local management to minimise damage to areas such as the lagoon verge and dunes

The Tripartite Agreement

In the late 1980's a small group of people started looking at securing Nature's Valley's future on a permanent basis. Informal discussions outlining a plan to incorporate Nature's Valley into the Tsitsikamma National Park were rejected by ratepayers who were suspicious of the motivation and wary of losing their autonomy.

Certain ecological components of Nature's Valley are intrinsically linked to those of the surrounding Tsitsikamma National Park. These are the dunes, the Lagoon edge in front of the Syndicate and the lagoon edge of the 'Eiland'. In 1991, a study recommended that SANParks formulate a policy to take over management of these areas through the Contractual Park mechanism. In 1994 a formal agreement was entered into between the Nature's Valley Ratepayer's Association, the Local Council of Nature's Valley (subsequently under the authority of Greater Plettenberg Bay Municipality) and the National Parks Board (and its successors, now South African National Parks). This agreement is known as the Tripartite Agreement or the Contractual Park Partnership.

This farsighted management plan is described in detail in the *Status Report* and affords Nature's Valley's sensitive ecological areas ***the strongest claim to permanent protection that is possible***. It is a solid foundation for conservation efforts in the future.

Coastal Policy And Legislation

Two excellent new policies provide a framework to guide the Nature's Valley community: These are the White Paper for Sustainable Coastal Development and Sensitive Coastal Areas regulations.

The White Paper for Sustainable Coastal Development (2000) aims to achieve development in South Africa through sustainable coastal management. The basic orientation of the policy is to treat the coast as a national asset. It promotes the duty to care for the environment, and ensures co-operative governance.

Although the community may feel proprietary about Nature's Valley, there is a need to acknowledge that Nature's Valley is a national asset. Only on this basis can the community play a role as custodians in influencing appropriate development.

The Sensitive Coastal Areas Act regulates activities within demarcated SCA's and permits are required for activities that disrupt natural environmental features. Nature's Valley falls within an SCA and permits are required for various activities, for example, clearing plots prior to building.

The *Status Report* provides short summaries of 8 other pieces of legislation that apply to environmental issues in Nature's Valley

Authority Structures

Nature's Valley

The three principal organisations relevant to Nature's Valley are the Plettenberg Bay Municipality (PBM), the South African National Parks (SANParks), the Nature's Valley Ratepayers Association (NVRAssociation) They are supported by organisations with a less direct role, such as Marine and Coastal Management (MCM) the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) and the Western Cape Nature Conservation Board (WCNCB).

The single most important issue, which influences the future of Nature's Valley, is the quality of community representation to the administrative bodies which have influence over Nature's Valley (most importantly the Plettenberg Bay Municipality and SANParks). The NVRAssociation in itself has no statutory standing, but is established as the representative body for the community and is recognised as such by the Municipality, and by SANParks as one of the stakeholders in the Tripartite Agreement

Consistent and lucid representation to local government administration, as well as developing Nature's Valley's current relationship with SANParks, is going to determine the future of the Nature's Valley. The NVTrust has undertaken, from the outset, to support the NVRAssociation and provide assistance in making this body as effective as possible.

Nature's Valley benefits enormously from the Contractual partnership. SANParks on the other hand, carries the annual workload and cost of maintaining and policing these areas. As a skilled, relatively well-resourced community, Nature's Valley has an opportunity to contribute to developing and expanding this existing partnership.

Marine and Coastal Management (MCM) and the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) do not have as obvious an influence on Nature's Valley as SANParks and Plettenberg Bay Municipality but certain of their programmes directly impact Nature's Valley and the surrounding area.

MCM's CoastCare programme contributes to coastal policy through two outreach programmes.

- *The Community Coastal Monitoring Programme* allows volunteers a chance to participate in a nation-wide coastal monitoring project.
- *'Working for Coast'* provides jobs and training for unemployed people in coastal communities to create and maintain a cleaner and safer coastal environment. The local team, now active in the Nature's Valley area, currently numbers 48 people.

'Working for Water' (WFW) is a Department of Water Affairs and Forestry programme that tackles the problem of invasive alien plants and alleviates unemployment. The Tsitsikamma 'Working for Water' programme aims to clear alien vegetation from the northern boundary of the National Park to Plettenberg Bay.

Coordinated action with other organizations is crucial to the efforts of the Trust. The *Status Report* describes an extensive network of relevant local and national organisations.

Covie

Covie and the Craggs are the 2 closest settlements to Nature's Valley. Both fall under the jurisdiction of the Plettenberg Bay Municipality. Covie lies on the border of the Tsikamma National Park. The area consists of 30 erven with eight to ten families permanently resident. Full time employment is scarce and a significant portion of the community depends on seasonal work. A significant recent development in Covie has been the lodging of a land claim.

In the 1980's tenants who rented land at Covie and who worked for the Forestry Department were told that they had to relocate to Coldstream and it was made clear that they would lose their jobs if they did not obey this instruction. Former residents of Covie recall this as a forced removal. The community became a shadow of its former self with a handful of remaining residents. Approximately 200 applications have been submitted with a claim to Covie property. White claimants are claiming monetary compensation for their allotments, which were expropriated. Coloured claimants are claiming the return of the commonage and with it access to the sea. The right of access to the sea is a matter of dispute, with SANParks stating that grazing rights were to the edge of the escarpment and access to the sea was permitted but was not a legal right. The residents claim that the commonage boundary was the high water mark.

The Covie land claim will be finalised in December 2001 and only once the claim is settled will it be decided how many erven are awarded.

The Craggs / Kurland

The Craggs includes Forest Hall, parts of Whisky Creek, multiple smallholdings, larger farms, private protected areas, conservancies, and Kurland Village. In 1994 the demographics of the area started changing, with migration of people from the former Transkei.

Developments in this area and Covie will have a significant impact on usage levels in Nature's Valley. It is appropriate to monitor and attempt to influence new developments and infrastructure in the area to be environmentally sound.

Environmental Threats And Opportunities

The results of a community survey to elicit perceived threats to Nature's Valley (January 2001) was the starting point for further investigation. Chapter 4 of the *Status Report* highlights some of the key ecological conflict issues.

Commercial Marine Resource Use

Oceanic waters of South Africa are abundant in marine life and rich in biodiversity. However due to an insatiable market, the global utilization of fish has been driven to an unsustainable level. The list of endangered fish in South Africa is already extensive. The Status Report describes the commercial fishing industry in some depth but it is primarily the squid fishing industry that affects Nature's Valley directly.

The squid-jigging industry targets spawning squid, also known as chokka. Plettenberg Bay is estimated to contain 140 separate squid spawning "nests", while the Tsitsikamma Marine Reserve is thought to protect 10 "nest" sites. In Plettenberg Bay there are 14 commercial chokka fishing boats plus 10 to 20 commercially active ski boats. Chokka fishing boats use powerful lights at night in order to attract squid. These lights illuminate the Nature's Valley area, particularly the beach, and have been the cause for years of complaint. Official objections have been lodged with Marine and Coastal Management (MCM) about the light and litter pollution attributed to the fishing boats. MCM have expressed an opinion that lights may be in excess of what is required to effectively attract squid.

Chokka catches in the Plettenberg Bay area have recently declined to such an extent, that it is apparently only viable for three commercial fishing boats to continue chokka fishing. The chokka industry is valued at R50 million per annum and creates multiple jobs. Aside from aesthetics, serious concerns include the impact of light and removal of squid biomass on other marine organisms.

To compensate for unpredictable chokka squid catches, the majority of the chokka boats in Plettenberg bay are also rigged for catching hake, an activity which takes place 5 to 10 km offshore. It is anticipated that if local hake stocks become low, fishermen will revert to targeting reef fish. Ski boats are not able to launch from Nature's Valley. Nevertheless, many boats from Plettenberg Bay fish off Nature's Valley possibly having a significant impact on the status of reef fish in the area.

Commercial and recreational ski boat fishing do overlap when fishing over shallow reefs and overexploitation of fish stocks is cause for concern.

Recreational Marine Resource Use

Angling

Fish species that remain resident for significant periods of time, run a particular risk of becoming locally extinct through overexploitation by both shore based and ski boat anglers. Populations are estimated to be so low, that even a bag limit of one fish per species per day, is unlikely to improve stocks. (See *Status Report* for references)

In Nature's Valley the historically excellent rock and surf fishing has attracted local and visiting anglers for many years. But by the time the Tsitsikamma National Park was closed to angling in 1975, catches were significantly diminished.

Marine Reserves are considered to be a viable means of allowing badly depleted fish stocks to recover and restock adjacent areas. Preliminary results of research, done by Dr. Cowley, from the JLB Smith Institute, in the Tsitsikamma National Park, suggest that spill-over of fish from the Reserve may now be sustaining fishermen's catches. Nature's Valley provides public access to fishing along this stretch of coast and, according to John Allan, Manager of the eastern section of the Tsitsikamma National Park, is regarded as a buffer zone for the marine reserve. This clearly places pressure on the area and justifies judicious management. Where current regulations are not adequate to protect fish populations, the community needs to go beyond respecting the letter of the law pertaining to bag limits.

The Oceanographic Research Institute (ORI) and Dr Cowley advocate that recreational fishermen, through tag-and-release programmes and collaborative research programmes, can make a significant contribution to managing resident fish species.

Invertebrate collecting

Marine invertebrate resources are renewable, but can only sustain a limited amount of exploitation. The number of people who exploit the resource for gain or personal consumption is increasing nationwide and it has become necessary to impose stricter bag limits. The capacity to enforce well-intended restrictions becomes a critical issue.

In Nature's Valley several species of invertebrates are collected between Salt River and the Groot River Mouth for bait and human consumption. There is unsubstantiated concern among local fishermen that more bait is removed than necessary and that the current regulations are not sufficient to protect the resource.

The Brown Mussel is an edible, indigenous rock mussel. It is under pressure from human exploitation and invasion by the alien Mediterranean Mussel. In Nature's Valley, Brown Mussels are still dominant, with a few Mediterranean Mussels starting to encroach. Mediterranean Mussels are considered better to eat than the native varieties and should preferably be targeted by collectors.

Subsistence Marine Resource Use

Coastal communities have traditionally made use of coastal resources as a source of food. For the poorer sector of South African society, such resources can contribute an important proportion of their protein needs. If legally entitled to sell part of their catch the pressure of poverty can result in overexploitation and may easily jeopardize the long-term sustainability of the resources that they utilise.

Subsistence fishing is relevant to Nature's Valley in the light of the land claim, put forward by members of the Covie community, which includes an attempt to secure fishing rights in the Tsitsikamma Park. Community members argue that fishing played a traditional role in their activities and was an important source of protein.

As more people move into the area, there may be a significant increase in subsistence and recreational marine resource use, which will require careful monitoring.

The authority responsible for managing and policing marine resource use is Marine and Coastal Management (MCM). MCM are understaffed, with only two people monitoring the coast from Wilderness to Storms River. MCM have requested that SANParks and other private organisations assist them in controlling consumptive marine resource use.

The Groot River Estuary

Estuaries are extremely vulnerable and easily damaged. According to studies done in 1983 and 1991, the Groot River estuary appears healthy, with the significant exception of intermittent contamination from the residential area's sewage.

As a result of low rainfall or high spring tides, the estuary mouth closes from time to time. If left to natural forces, the mouth opens spontaneously after heavy rains. Houses built along Lagoon Drive were being flooded regularly when the mouth closed and the practice of opening the mouth was officially approved in 1986. Current practice dictates that before being opened mechanically, the flooding lagoon must reach a predetermined height based on the threat to infrastructure. On average, the mouth is opened three to four times a year.

Artificial breaching can adversely influence the successful completion of marine life cycles. Expert opinions concur that if artificial opening is necessary, the best time to do so, is when the estuary is at its fullest and the tide is at its lowest, so as to maximise the scouring effect. Ideally, opening should also coincide with the life cycles of the fish and invertebrates living in the estuary

The issue of sewage pollution levels in the estuary has been a subject of much debate and expense. Testing of the estuary water quality by the Municipality indicates that at certain times *E.coli* levels in the estuary are above acceptable levels. The pollution is most frequently detected when the lagoon mouth opens (naturally or mechanically) and water levels drop, drawing polluted water into the lagoon. In order to combat this, the Municipality requested that the recommended level at which the mouth is opened, be experimentally dropped by 200mm. We would suggest that in order to manage sewage related pollution levels, it is advisable to investigate **causal** factors rather than to alter management practices.

Uncontrolled exploitation of the living resources of estuaries through fishing or bait collection can have serious effects. Exceeding recreational carrying capacity may also have a detrimental effect. Carrying capacity is defined as 'The level of recreational use which land can sustain without an unacceptable degree of impact' Previous studies have estimated that the estuary, having an area of 12 ha, has a physical carrying capacity of about 100 small craft. This density takes no cognisance of the disturbance to sensitive species such as White-backed Night Heron and African Finfoot.

Nature's Valley Beach And Dune

Responsible use extends to other fragile ecosystems such as the dunes. In consultation with several environmental experts, many of whom visited Nature's Valley during the year, it became clear that we have been extremely fortunate to retain the dune system in a near pristine state. Very few, if any, coastal developments have excluded their dunes from development, and the value of this area is considerable. Not only do the dunes provide a refuge for birds, wildlife and flora, but the residential area is protected from wind, sand and sea spray. Consensus is clear that the dunes are fragile, much more so than the beach area. Consistent advice from coastal experts is that great care should be taken not to trample and erode the dunes. Walking and particularly sundowners should be enjoyed on the beach (as opposed to the dunes) and dogs must be strictly excluded from the dune area in order to protect nesting birds and animals. In 1994 the dunes were afforded the highest level of protection under the National Parks Act No. 57 of 1976 when they were included in the Contractual Park.

Alien Vegetation

The indigenous fynbos and forest vegetation in and around Nature's Valley is one of the most valuable and appreciated attributes of the region. Aerial photographs and ground verification around the Salt and Groot Rivers indicate a light to medium infestation of Hakea and Pine in the Fynbos, with Wattle and Blackwood in the forests and gorges.

Working for Water's priority is clearing catchment areas that provide water for human consumption. The Groot and Salt Rivers are not regarded as important water catchments, as the only user-community is Nature's Valley. Nevertheless the presence of invasive alien species in these areas poses a possible threat to biodiversity in the Tsitsikamma National Park through seed dispersal. This also applies to the residential area and eradication of aggressive aliens such as *Pereskia* (as opposed to non invasive aliens) is essential. In South Africa landowners are under legal obligation to control invading alien plants on their properties.

The Municipal Manager has made a concerted effort to remove declared invasive aliens from the Fynbos Reserve, road verges and other public areas. A further legal duty of landowners to control alien plants with specific relevance to Nature's Valley, is a clause in the title deeds which states that "no trees known as Port Jackson, Wattle trees or any plant, tree or shrub deemed by the company to be noxious or objectionable, shall be planted, cultivated or allowed to flower on this Erf, without the written consent of the Company having been obtained".

Negative Wildlife Interactions

Refuse left out overnight, or for a few days as a consequence of not knowing when refuse is collected, attracts scavenging wildlife and dogs. Increasingly bold and aggressive baboons and monkeys result from habituation to a human food source.

Snaring of wildlife is a substantial problem. The Municipal Manager, reports finding 20 to 30 snares a year and foresters remove snares and find trapped animals on a regular basis.

Dogs

The issue of dogs in Nature's Valley is long standing and highly emotive. The spectrum of opinion ranges from those who feel that dogs should be banned from Nature's Valley to families who would not consider living or holidaying in Nature's Valley without their dogs.

Dogs impact on the environment in a number of ways and eye witness, confirmed reports are essential to construct an objective case regarding dog management. We have tried to avoid anecdotal reports or identify them as such.

Dogs have featured in repeated (anecdotal) reports of hunting and killing wildlife in and around Nature's Valley. The most recent (confirmed) incident (November 2001) was an attack on a bushbuck fawn by the dog of a resident. The bushbuck was put down due to severe injuries. Repeated (confirmed) sightings of unsupervised dogs covering the length of the beach, crossing the mouth and entering the forest into the National Park, are disturbing. Dogs running off a leash in the dune area and on the beach disturb birds and wildlife. If this happens on a daily basis, it may prevent ground nesting birds from successfully breeding. Dog faeces pollute the beach, lagoon edge and groundwater. Keeping dogs makes it legally necessary for owners to fence properties, thereby restricting the movement of wildlife in Nature's Valley.

The Plettenberg Bay Municipality is in the process of revising outdated dog legislation. This is particularly relevant based on the incidents described above and an incident (2001) on the beach where a couple sustained multiple dog bites after an attacked by 2 dogs. If the Nature's Valley community is able to reach consensus on a set of regulations pertaining to dogs the Municipality will uphold those regulations.

Stand Development

Building regulations

Historically the majority of houses cover less than 30% of the stand surface area, most are unfenced and many homeowners have preserved indigenous vegetation. There has been a trend toward building larger homes in Nature's Valley which have attracted criticism and admiration, based on architectural taste, height, visibility and obstructed views. From an environmental point of view, these homes, which can legally utilise as much as 50% of the stand area, translate into reduced natural area and fewer corridors for wildlife.

There has been much debate about the legitimacy of these large homes and other houses, which have been expanded over the years. It has been established that these homes are within existing national building regulations. The questions that this raises is, are the current building regulations appropriate for Nature's Valley, do they reflect the sense of place of Nature's Valley and do they contribute to maintaining as natural an environment as possible?

Legal approval of plans rests with the Municipality but the NVR Association is in a very powerful position to:

- Object to or suggest amendments to building plans
- Ensure that Sensitive Coastal Area Act permits are applied for and due process is followed
- Recommend specific regulations applicable to Nature's Valley, (which the Municipality will enforce if the majority of the community supports the amendments)

Open Area Management And Indigenous Gardening

Indigenous gardening in Nature's Valley and active management of the Fynbos Reserve will contribute to maintaining a high biodiversity of plant, animal and insect life and reducing the possibility of alien spread.



In September 2001, a workshop was hosted by the NV Trust and funded by the Rowland and Letta Hill Trust of WWF. The status of the Phyl Martin Park and Fynbos Reserve was assessed. A draft management plan will be circulated to the community for comment. Recommendations are covered in detail in the *Status Report*.

Commercial Development

A feature of Nature's Valley has been a relatively short holiday season with a prolonged quiet period where the valley is relatively undisturbed. This is changing as Nature's Valley is being impacted by growth in the regional tourism industry.

The shop is Nature's Valley's only commercial site. There are a number of B&B's but only one has been rezoned to Residential 5, giving it flat and townhouse rights. Historically all other potential commercial or development sites have been rezoned for residential use or have had proposed developments rejected.

A concern is that a proliferation of B&B's and guesthouses could have a significant impact on the character of the area. Environmental concerns include the impact that larger houses and increased human activity will have on water pollution, the sewage system, vegetation and movement of animals through Nature's Valley. The demand for accommodation is having expected consequences. An application has been lodged to rezone erf 130 (next to the shop) to Residential 5.

Seasonal commercial activity is increasing and includes Municipal approval for 11 stands to be available for hawkers in December 2001, allowing them to trade in any goods. This disregards a resolution taken at the ratepayers AGM in December 2000 to allow hawking of fresh produce only.

As development in Plettenberg Bay reaches saturation point, developers are looking further afield. Developments adjacent to Nature's Valley will have a significant impact on utilisation of natural resources in Nature's Valley. The White Paper on

Sustainable Coastal Development supports coastal tourism and the right of access to the coast while at the same time advocating that the process be well managed.

At this early stage it may be wise for the community to debate and decide on an appropriate level of commercial activity for Nature's Valley, while maintaining the wilderness character of the area.

Sewage

An emerging issue, which the *Status Report* has helped to clarify, is that of sewage contamination of the lagoon. Inadvertent as well as deliberate action by homeowners has been implicated as the source of contamination in Municipal reports. Deliberate action unfortunately includes rerouting sewage outlets into the storm water drain, which runs into the lagoon. Inadvertent actions include:

- Overcrowding holiday homes, resulting in overflow from conservancy tanks and septic drains;
- Inappropriate, old and damaged sewage disposal systems in waterlogged areas and the lagoon front.

The official response has been to treat the effect rather than the cause. This includes chlorination of storm water run off into the lagoon when contamination is detected, and a trial period of lowering the water level at which the lagoon mouth is mechanically opened. The lagoon is probably the most vulnerable ecosystem in Nature's Valley and the effect of further interference with the mouth may have a detrimental impact. Both SANParks and the Municipality have undertaken to closely monitor the effects of this experiment.

The risk to Nature's Valley is that a solution, such as formal reticulated sewage disposal, may be imposed on our community. We are aware that this option is being seriously entertained by the Municipality and while we are unsure of the precise motivation, it would be unfortunate if the justification from municipal authorities was due to the actions or inadvertent negligence of a minority of homeowners. The cost implications alone are frightening and the disturbance to Nature's Valley when installing such infrastructure is, to our minds, untenable and fundamentally unnecessary. Our responsible use of the infrastructure and surroundings is imperative. Geoff McIlleron has written an expert assessment of appropriate sewage disposal options in the *Status Report* and we urge ratepayers to familiarize themselves with the issue.

Security

Nature's Valley has not been immune from the national crime trend, although approximate police statistics for Nature's Valley over the past five years (contained in the status report) compare favourably to the rest of the country.

The environmental effects of a deteriorating security situation in Nature's Valley are worth considering. Fenced properties, aggressive dogs, security lighting and piercing alarm noise (familiar to most South Africans) are inappropriate in the Nature's Valley environment. The response, to date, has been to secure individual homes and there

are now **three** alarm companies that operate in Nature's Valley. The benefit of individual security and not a community based approach is questionable.

Precedents of access control have been set elsewhere in the country where communities have acted independently to secure the safety of their own areas. In the light of the White Paper on Sustainable Coastal Development, it is debatable whether access control to Nature's Valley would be approved.

We suggest that the opportunity for the community to collectively manage security without retreating into individual fortified lagers would be to everybody's benefit. The positive spin off of community-based security has wider benefits such as control of wildlife and marine poaching.

The Urban Conservancy

Setting up Nature's Valley as an 'Urban Conservancy' may be an appropriate vehicle to mobilise the community around environmental issues. A conservancy is established by voluntary agreement between two or more landowners to manage the environment based on a shared conservation ethic and an agreed set of guidelines. Conservancies are not restricted to agricultural areas and can also be established in residential areas. A distinct advantage of the concept is that the entire community does not have to participate from the outset and property owners may join as and when they see value in participating. The experience of successful conservancies has been an enhanced environment, increased property values and improved security.

The Way Forward

The *Status Report* concludes by emphasising that the single greatest threat is the impact of inappropriate and uncontrolled development, both within Nature's Valley and the surrounding areas. Rezoning, informal commercial activity and the Covie land claim all have the potential to have a profound impact on the character of Nature's Valley in the near or immediate future.

To play a constructive role and to avoid being marginalized, it becomes crucial for the community to be accurately informed regarding proposed developments. In addition it is a further opportunity to maintain Nature's Valley as a model of sensitive development.

An informed, mobilized and well-represented community, can play an important custodianship role by:

- Ensuring that development is appropriate and sustainable
- Preventing the use of the valley for selfish gain or vested interest
- Ensuring the sustainable use of the area's natural resources.

This can be achieved through:

- An informed constituency
- Strengthening the relationship with SANParks
- Contributing to conservation and research efforts
- Active involvement in decision making structures
- Active engagement with our immediate neighbours, in particular Covie.

There is opportunity for positive action. Issues such as environmentally friendly stand development, assisting with a management plan for the Fynbos Reserve, pursuing the concept of an urban conservancy, promoting sustainable marine resource use and conservation projects, are well within our reach. Knowledgeable and competent people are well represented in the community and have clearly demonstrated a willingness to participate in efforts that contribute to the future of the area.

The Proposed Role Of The NVTrust

We envisage that the NVTrust could play a role in the following areas:

1. Supporting the NVRAssociation,
2. Maintaining efficient channels of communication and promoting a mobilized community,
3. Raising awareness of sensitive ecosystems,
4. Collaborating with research projects,
5. Linking with important conservation organisations.
6. Monitoring development proposals and influencing them to be environmentally sensitive.

In Conclusion

Implementing tangible goals is going to require substantial effort and commitment from persons who are who are effective and accountable. Realistically, only someone who is remunerated in a full time or part time capacity is likely to meet this expectation. The NVTrust can only extend its efforts into 2002 if adequate funding is secured. Funding of this magnitude is unlikely to be sustained by a few families (as was the case in 2001) but would require only a small commitment if the majority of the community participated.

To assess what a coordinated initiative can achieve and if the NVTrust is valid and has a role to play, we hope that you will take the time to study the *Status Report*, familiarize yourself with the threats and opportunities identified and consider the proposed NVTrust *Action Plan*.

Our vision is to secure Nature's Valley's unique environment, in perpetuity, for the enjoyment of generations to come.

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Thanks to M-Print for sponsoring the printing