



Piet du Plessis & Medewerkers

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TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Coutada 5 is at 687 000 ha the largest of the 12 operational Coutadas in Mozambique, and is as such an official protected area. When the Wettstein-family first applied for the concession for Coutada 5 in 2012, they had a dream of a wilderness area where all the game species that once roamed the area, would be re-introduced. They knew from the very beginning that a huge responsibility goes hand in hand with the development, and that a comprehensive all-inclusive approach would be required to fulfil the expectations of all role players, i.e. government, local communities, environment and themselves.

Unsustainable utilization, especially during and shortly after the civil war of the nineteen-eighties and early nineties, was one of the main reasons for the depletion and even extirpation of almost all wildlife. The Wettstein initiative to develop the area, must be evaluated against this background, with the almost non-existing conservation status of the area that they inherited as an aggravating factor.

However, Messrs Oli and Urs Wettstein realised that the development would require a balanced scientific approach, with inputs from various environmental experts, to ensure the compilation of a well-balanced and economical/ecological viable biodiversity and management plan in order to guide future actions.

Their major objectives with the development of Coutada 5 are:

- A well-balanced approach to ensure that the biodiversity resources of the area is protected and managed in such a way that it will contribute to fulfil the expectations of all role players
- Secondly, to restore the wildlife to its historical state
- Thirdly, to contribute to the socio-economic upliftment of the local communities.

A multi-disciplinary approach was necessary to ensure that the objectives did not merely remain daydreams of the developers. Therefore, highly experienced wildlife specialists were tasked to undertake the necessary introductory research and surveys, and thus to contribute to the completeness of the development plan. Already their inputs had contributed to a large extent to understand the vastness of actions and activities required to make the dreams come true. It should be noted that all the experts are very motivated, enthusiastic and willing to continue with their various tasks. Their ranks include highly-regarded specialists such as Dr Niels Jacobsen PhD, Lampies Lambrechts MSc, Cornel du Plessis MSc, Andre Engelbrecht DipEd, Prof Piet du Plessis PhD and others.

Developments that have been undertaken by the Wettsteins illustrate their commitment to the rehabilitation of the area, and also their commitment to contribute to the socio-economic upliftment of the local extremely poor communities. A 10-chalet lodge with

restaurant, bar and dining room has, for example, been built next to the highway in order to initiate economic activities and employment opportunities in the area; an initiative to collect honey and to establish productive and sustainable beehives scattered over the area has been introduced; a sustainable hardwood-logging and export operation is in its final planning stage; a woodwork factory has been established near the market in Inhambane to process wood cut in the Coutada; an airstrip has been built to accommodate light aircraft; locals have been contracted and facilitated to produce vegetables for the lodge, and many many more.

Unfortunately the above actions have recently been curtailed by the renewed armed clashes in the area, to such an extent that the lodge was virtually non-operative for the last eight months. Also, the armed clashes act as a brake to all scientific surveys and consultation processes with local communities. However, and at great cost, the Wettsteins kept all commercial activities going in order not to lose the confidence of the communities.

During this slack period a special effort to involve government, both on national, provincial, district and local levels in the planning process, was initiated. It also gave management the opportunity to re-address certain issues, and to work on the introduction and acceptance of the project by the international community. The vast scale of the project, both financially and ecologically, will necessitate international involvement and more specifically, a financial contribution to finance actions of a non-commercial nature.

In a nutshell, this project initiated by the Wettstein-family is feasible, though it must be borne in mind that it will not happen overnight, and especially not without the help of donors from abroad. Although the Wettstein-family financed all commercial activities, and is prepared to finance it in future, funding for especially community activities and benefits, hugely expensive wildlife rehabilitation projects and for future scientific studies, will be needed from outside sources.

All management and operational structures are in place and can be put in motion on a short notice; operational activities - although scaled down – can be also be re-activated on short notice, and scientific studies and community- consultation processes can continue without any further delays.

I am therefore of the opinion that the rehabilitation and development of Coutada 5 is feasible, and that the area will be developed according to established scientific principles and guidelines. The people involved dispose of the necessary means and resources, and also dedication, expertise and experience, to make it happen!

I wish them good luck with the project.

(signed) Prof PC du Plessis