

Media Release - 26/06/2001

To Cell Or Not... The Results

The great debate on whether cell phones should be allowed in National Parks has reached finality with the announcement of the results of the survey.

"The establishment of a cellular network in a National Park is a listed activity in terms of the EIA regulations and therefore an appropriate environmental investigation had to be conducted," says Murray Macgregor, Head of Environmental Services at South African National Parks (SANParks).

The Public Opinion Survey (POS) commenced towards the end of 2000 and was due to be concluded at the end of February 2001. Due to certain logistical problems, including the postal strike earlier this year, the deadline was extended for a further period. The questionnaire was made available on the SANParks website, at all SANParks offices and National Parks, and was distributed with all booking confirmations. It was also widely publicised in the media.

"After studying the results of the survey with the help of Technikon Pretoria's Marketing Department, it is clear that the majority of the respondents do not support the use of cell phones in National Parks," says Murray.

These results will now be submitted to the Senior Management of SANParks for a policy decision in this regard.

The most pertinent results of the survey are summarised below (sample size - 940):

1. 52.77% of respondents indicated that they were not in favour of the use of cellular phones in National Parks, while 39.26% were and 7.98% were unsure or undecided on this issue.
2. 72.5% of respondents indicated that they carried a cell phone when visiting National Parks.
3. When asked for what purpose they carried a cell phone 43.6% indicated that it was for personal reasons, 39.9% for security reasons and 20% for business purposes.
4. The question was asked to what extent visual traces of the cellular network (towers) bothered them. The reply was as follows: To a great extent - 38.73%; to a certain extent - 27.25%; neutral -10.96 %; to a minor extent 9.84%; and not at all - 13.21%.
5. 72.48% indicated that a private conversation in public by means of a cell phone irritated them, while 23.1% were not bothered by this and 4.41% indicated that they were not sure.
6. When asked if the use of cellular phones in public in National Parks bothered them the response was as follows: Yes - 67.94% , No - 24.54% and Not sure 7.52%.
7. 8.63% indicated that the use of cell phones would add value to their "Wilderness Experience" while 91.37% indicated that it would not.
8. 7.24% indicated that a cell phone would add value to their game viewing while 92.76% indicated 'no' in this regard.
9. 25.98% of respondents indicated that a cell phone would add value to their visit in general while 74.02% indicated that this would not be the case.
10. On the assumption that cellular coverage would be introduced or continued (in certain cases) the question was asked if cell phones should be restricted to camps only. 71.91% indicated 'yes' while 28.09% indicated 'no'.
11. On the same assumption as above and when asked if it would be acceptable if cellular coverage be restricted to a limited area within a camp/National Park (i.e. the reception area of a camp for instance) 68.67% of the respondents indicated 'yes' while 31.33% indicated 'no'.
12. When asked if the existing telecommunications land line system in National Parks was adequate (i.e. Telkom land lines) 59.79% of respondents indicated 'yes', 28.69% 'no' and 11.52% 'not applicable'.
13. Relating to the question if cellular coverage were to be discontinued in National Parks would it influence the frequency of their visits to National Parks 19.27% answered 'yes', 75.34% answered 'no' and 5.38% were not sure.
14. If respondents answered 'yes' to the preceding question they were prompted as to whether they would visit

- National Parks on a more or less frequent basis. 63.26% indicated that they would visit National Parks on a more frequent basis if cell phones were discontinued and 36.75% indicated they would visit National Parks on a less frequent basis if cellular coverage was discontinued.
15. When asked if they would be happy to make use of land lines as the only communication method in National Parks 64.5% of respondents said 'yes', 27.35% said 'no' and 8.15% were not sure.
 16. The question was asked if visitors find the use of cellular telephones in protected areas such as National Parks to be offensive in any way. The responses were as follows: Yes - 62.47% and No - 37.52%.
 17. When asked if the use of cellular phones may be acceptable in certain National Parks/camps and unacceptable in others the response was: Yes - 28.8% and No - 71.2%.
 18. On the assumption that cellular coverage will be continued (where existing) or introduced into National Parks, the majority of the respondents (88%) who indicated that they are not in favour of the use of cellular phones in National Parks indicated that they were in favour of the restriction of cellular coverage to camps only (this represents nearly half the poll - 46%). Of those who were in favour of cell phones in National Parks 48.78% indicated that cellular coverage should be restricted to camps only.
 19. Under the same scenario as above, the vast majority of those respondents (80%) who indicated that they are not in favour of the use of cellular phones in National Parks indicated that they are in favour of the restriction of cellular coverage to limited areas in camps (this represents 43% of the poll). Of those who were in favour of cellular coverage in National Parks 49.32% indicated that they were in favour of restricting coverage to limited areas within camps.
 20. The vast majority of respondents (83%) who indicated that they are not in favour of cellular coverage in National Parks indicated that they were satisfied with the existing landline system of communications while 57% of those in favour of cellular coverage in National Parks also indicated that the existing landline was acceptable.
 21. The vast majority of respondents (79%) who indicated that they are not in favour of the use of cellular phones in National Parks indicated that the possible discontinuation of the cellular network will not influence their visits to National Parks (this represents 43% of the poll).
 22. Surprisingly 67% of the respondents who are in favour of cellular coverage indicated that the possible discontinuation of the cellular network would not influence their visits to National Parks.
 23. The vast majority of respondents (90%) who indicated that they were not in favour of cellular coverage in National Parks indicated that they were happy with using land lines as the only means of communication in National Parks (this represents 50 % of the poll).
 24. On the other hand 60% of those in favour of the use of cellular coverage indicated that they are not happy with the use of landlines as the only means of communication from National Parks.
 25. The vast majority of respondents (87%) who had indicated that they are not in favour of cellular coverage in National Parks indicated that they do find the use of cellular telephones offensive in any way (this represents 47% of the poll).

Other:

1. SAfm conducted a poll on the 9/1/2001 on this topic. Ninety percent of those who called in indicated that they were not in favour of cellular usage in National Parks.
2. As a result of the announcement in terms of the EIA procedures for the implementation of a further phase of the cellular network in the Kruger National Park about a year ago, a petition with 98 signatures was received objecting to the use of cell phones in National Parks.
3. The Getaway Magazine also facilitated a response in this regard in which 44% of the respondents were not in favour of cellular coverage in National Parks, 32% for coverage and 24% indicating the acceptability of restricted use of cellular phones in National Parks.

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