HOODIA GORDONII IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

AUTHOR:
Elsabe Swart

Hoodia gordonii (family: Apocynaceae) has a fairly large distribution range occurring predominantly in South Africa and Namibia. The spatial distribution pattern is patchy and is mainly associated with summer rainfall areas, in a range of habitats. Biological information, population trends and resource availability information lack on the species, but there are indications that this perennial succulent has an estimated life-span of 15 to 20 years and only flowers after three to six years. Flowering is protracted and seeds are wind dispersed. It has also been suggested that the species has a weedy character and that germination occurs readily.

Natural die-back events have been recorded and natural threats are present. Global trends are unknown, but local declines have been recorded. In an attempt to manage the resource sustainable a Resource Assessment Management Report (RAMR) system was implemented. Through this system basic demographic and population density information is collected (site specific), together with related management and environmental information. The demographic information was used to determine population health while the line transect data was mainly used for quota calculations. Quality of data was checked by referring to the area surveyed vs the area of occurrence and comparing line transect data with that of the quadrant data (ref. health and density). Harvesting methods were prescribed using information obtained from previously harvested sites (not scientifically

verified). A spatial impact analysis was done to sensitise ourselves on potential harvesting impact within its distribution range.

A preliminary market demand calculation was done as reference to evaluate the potential demand we could expect – and whether we would regard it sustainable or not if all trading material was obtained from wild harvesting. All applicants were urged to resort to cultivations in the long-term as initial indications are that wild harvesting will not be sustainable.

Harvesting permits could facilitate information obtainment, though it depends on collaboration between clients and authorities. However, research Institutes should assist in the obtainment of biological information to enable improved quota formulation. Systems and guidelines that could ensure non-detriment finding (NDF) evaluations within a dynamic environment (personnel turnover and environmental) would be helpful, but should not replace scientific expertise as it should still be evaluated for compatibility to the species at hand. Therefore the first step should always remain a review of the species before conducting any non-detriment finding.