

Sappi's stout defence of forest-planting in Mozambique wilds

# Project 'nothing like St Lucia'

**'If environmentalists had their way, Sappi would not be allowed to plant trees anywhere,' Science Writer ANITA ALLEN was told.**

AS MOZAMBIQUE recovers from war, the picture that emerges is pristine wilderness, unspoilt beaches and marine paradises — 27 islands of the Quirimbas archipelago and five islands of the Bazaruto archipelago.

Another picture is a country devastated by war, with large areas of land sparsely populated where wildlife has been hunted out. A country absolutely desperate for development.

The single biggest challenge in reconciling these pictures is development without compromising the ecological integrity of wilderness areas. Already the first clashes between developers and conservationists have occurred over an afforestation project by the South African industrial giant, Sappi.

Conservationists have raised the spectre of a St Lucia-type controversy because a Sappi project south of the Maputo Elephant Reserve is an ecologically sensitive wetland area, and no environmental impact study has been conducted.

In addition, they say, the Sappi concession poses a threat to traditional migration routes of elephants which move along the Futi watercourse between the Maputo reserve and South Africa's Tembe Elephant Park. Sappi wood resources man-



**COMPLEMENTARY:** The director of Mozambique's National Directorate of Forestry and Wildlife, Dr Milagre Cezerilo, sees development and the environment as two sides of the same coin.

ager Neville Perry, who this week returned from an aerial reconnaissance of Mozambique, hotly disputes these allegations. Putting "the proper perspective" on the issue, Perry said Mozambique covered some 800 600 sq km. Gazetted wildlife areas covered 87 000 sq km, or 11 percent of the total. Sappi's project involved 350 sq km, or 0.04 percent of the whole.

"Our original concession was for 150 000 ha south of the Maputo Elephant Reserve right up to the Maputo River. We are taking up the option to plant on 30 000 ha east of the Futi watercourse. We have taken into account concerns over elephant migration routes and have left a 10 km-wide by 40 km-long corridor for them."

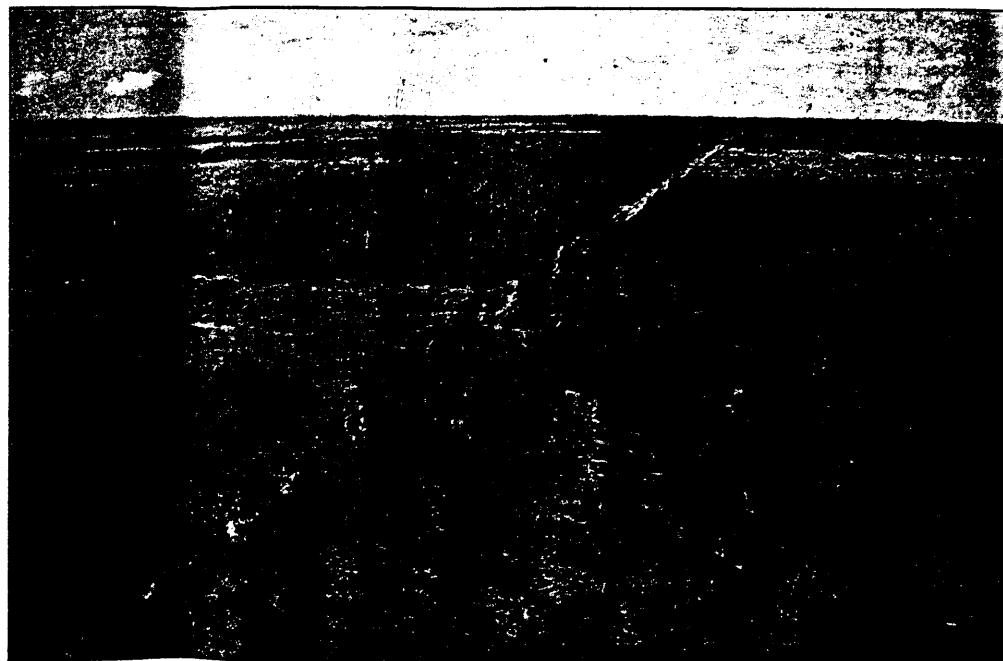
He said there was absolutely no similarity between Sappi's project in Mozambique and the St Lucia wetlands. "We will not be planting in sensitive areas and our project does not include wetlands. It is predom-

inantly grasslands, with sandy soils and marshy pans.

"There are a few small areas of indigenous scrub, which we will leave as micro habitats. We will not be planting right up to the coastline and the one indigenous forest area along the Futi watercourse will be left intact. Exact boundaries are still a matter of discussion.

"We are not going there to ruin anything. The project was started several years ago, but we have been prevented from going in there because of the war. This project has been well planned. We have called in consultants, who have done aerial and field surveys. The entire study runs to two volumes.

"We are working on this in conjunction with the Mozambican government; in fact, the process is controlled by them. It is a complete socio-economic development which will uplift the community and open up hundreds of job opportunities. It involves housing, infrastruc-



**PROJECT AREA:** The road from Maputo to Ponta de Oure in southern Mozambique snakes through Sappi's planned commercial forestry concession, which includes previous scrappy eucalyptus plantations. Clashes have already erupted between conservationists and developers over the afforestation project by the South African commercial giant.

● Photograph: JOHN LEDGER

ture such as towns, schools and training in informal farming."

For South Africans who are still embroiled in the St Lucia controversy, the claims and counter-claims will be all too familiar. But unlike St Lucia, no environmental impact assessment has been called for by the Mozambican government, nor is there any legislation to make this mandatory.

Environmental impact assessments are unknown in Mozambique, according to Dr Mi-

lagre Cezerilo, director of Mozambique's National Directorate of Forestry and Wildlife (Direccao Nacional de Florestas e Fauna Bravia — DNFFB).

In an interview in Johannesburg, she said a National En-

vironmental Commission had now been established, to deal with such issues. Commenting on the Sappi project, Cezerilo confirmed that as far as the DNFFB was concerned there was no controversy.

"I believe Sappi will co-operate with us in connection with environmental issues. They have shown they are willing to consider the environment."

Perry said that no matter where Sappi moved to, environ-

mentalists would never take a balanced view. "The facts are that we have been hounded by environmentalists in South Africa to the point that we have to look across our borders to grow trees. If they had their way we would not be allowed to plant trees anywhere."

Perry does not disagree that forestry operations have an impact on the environment, but he said Sappi is an environmentally conscious company. "We do a lot of environmental rehabilitation — clearing exotics such as wattles, unblocking and upgrading of riverine areas and woodlands. But we get no credit for this from environmentalists. Yes, we take out. But we do put back."

Sappi is just one of many companies and private entrepreneurs attracted by the potential for development in Mozambique. Where this much-needed development affects the environment, the director of the DNFFB is confident the process can be managed so that there is a win-win solution.

"We don't look at development and the environment as different issues. They are associated. Today's developers also see it this way. No one can afford bad management. In the long run they have just too much to lose," Cezerilo said.

In South Africa, sometimes bitter experience has proved that legislation by the Government is the only way to ensure that adequate environmental impact assessments are done by developers going into wilderness areas.