

'Mad Max' accused of destroying Namib desert

March 4 2013, by Brigitte Weidlich



The dry bed of the Kuiseb River in the Namib Desert is shown on June 15, 2008. Namibian environmental groups and tourism companies expressed fury Monday about a film crew's alleged destruction of sensitive areas in the world's oldest desert while shooting "Mad Max: Fury Road."

Namibian environmental groups and tourism companies expressed fury Monday about a film crew's alleged destruction of sensitive areas in the world's oldest desert while shooting "Mad Max: Fury Road."

"They added tracks in untouched areas," tour operator Tommy Collard told AFP from Swakopmund.

"What is worse is the film crew tried to remove the marks they left themselves by dragging nets over them, ripping plants out," Collard added.

"Together with other coastal tour operators we have collected a lot of photographic evidence. One cannot rehabilitate the landscape of the [Namib Desert](#)," said Collard.

Smaller animals like lizards, geckos and chameleons suffered, as well as the rare lithops cactus, he told AFP.

Filming took place in a section of the Namib [Desert](#) recently proclaimed as Dorob National Park.

The coastal watchdog NACOMA (Namibian Coast Conservation and Management) Project had commissioned ecological scientist Joh Henschel to compile a report on the environmental damage.

It was sent to the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) last December for response and actions.

"NACOMA contracted me as consultant about the tracks left by the Mad Max film crew and yes – some areas in the Namib Desert were destroyed," Henschel said. "In one area a ploughing device was used." He declined to give more details citing "contractual obligations".

A copy of the report seen by AFP Monday laid some responsibility at the door of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism.

"The permit and environmental clearance granted by the MET to the

Mad Max project were not sufficiently specific so as to serve to guide the management of environmental compliance of the project."

In an angry response to media reports about the alleged devastation, the Namibia Film Commission (NFC) placed a full page advertisement in state-owned newspaper New Era to "refute the allegations... in the strongest terms."

"'Mad Max(4): Fury Road' has to our satisfaction... faced up to their responsibilities within Namibia... we register no reservations and give 'Mad Max(4): Fury Road' a clean bill," the NFC stated.

The film commission blamed local media for reporting alleged "untruths" and wanting "to tarnish" Namibia's reputation.

Similarly, the ministry of environment's permanent secretary Simeon Negumbo said the film company conducted land rehabilitation to the ministry's satisfaction.

"From the beginning the experienced, dedicated team used tried and tested methods like vehicle and hand-dragged fishing nets, tyres, brooms, chains, ropes and leaf blowers, which worked perfectly in the area", according to Negumbo.

Namibia last year applied to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) to have a more southern part of the Namib Desert declared the "Namib Sand Sea" to be included on the World Heritage List.

According to the application document, in that desert area there are "vast panoramas of majestic dune-scapes, strikingly crystallised in sharply silhouetted forms continually transformed by wind and time."

The World Heritage Committee will meet this June in Cambodia to decide on the application.

"Mad Max: Fury Road" is the fourth Max film of George Miller and stars Charlize Theron.

It was filmed between July and December last year.

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