

RESOLUTION FOR THE BOTANICAL SOCIETY OF SA, KIRSTENBOSCH BRANCH; AGM 10 JUNE 2023

Proposed by Jonathan Schrire; Seconded by Prof Eugene Moll

That Kirstenbosch branch is in favour of engaging directly with SANBI (South African National Biodiversity Institute) in order to get SANBI to

- a) release the Botanical Society and its Council from the confidentiality agreement which they have imposed, and which prevents BotSoc from sharing with its members documents relating to the agreements with SANBI, including the proposed removal of free entry to Botanical Gardens;**
- b) reverse their proposed termination of the free entry benefit to Botanical Gardens enjoyed by BotSoc members for 110 years.**

MOTIVATION and background:

All eleven Botanical Gardens in SA including Kirstenbosch, are owned by SANBI a Govt Dept. One of the conditions when Kirstenbosch was created, 110 years ago, was that there must be an organisation of civil society to support Kirstenbosch. That organisation is the Botanical Society (BotSoc), which is now the biggest Conservation NGO in the country, with 14,000 members. Kirstenbosch branch is the biggest, with 7,000 members.

For all this period members have enjoyed the right of free access to the Gardens.

SANBI has now unilaterally demanded that this free access be ended.

BotSoc's own management have estimated that without the benefit of free entry, our membership and income will decline by over 80%. BotSoc's annual membership income of R5 mn will be less than R 1 mn. This will put an end to all the Conservation and outreach programs which BotSoc is funding. It will be a disaster for BotSoc.

The reasons given by SANBI for this make no sense. They say they need the income lost by allowing free entry, which they estimate at R7 mn pa. Their annual income is over R800 mn, so this will increase it **by less than 1%**. Yet for this insignificant income they are prepared to destroy their most valuable NGO partner. BotSoc has even offered to pay them R5 mn pa, but they have refused. Their decision is unreasonable and illogical.

BotSoc's Council, whom we elect, has tried to reason quietly and in private with SANBI, but without success, and now say they can do nothing more. Some concerned members feel that Council has not approached this with proper resolve, nor properly investigated all avenues, including public and legal pressure. We do not believe that we should meekly accept SANBI's decision.

We have been hampered by the fact that our own Council has refused to share with members any of the documents relating to this issue, including the Collaboration Agreements which govern our relationship with SANBI. We were told that the confidentiality agreement with SANBI prevents this. So we are in the bizarre position where our own representatives refuse to share critical information with the very members who elected them! Hence our demand that SANBI release our Council from this senseless and undemocratic confidentiality restriction.

This is the most critical issue to face BotSoc in its entire history. We may not prevail, but let us at least try. Please vote in favour of this resolution.