STOCK THEFT IN
KWAZULU-NATAL
Our Vision

“The people of KwaZulu-Natal live in a safe and secure environment.”

Our Mission

“Be the lead agency in driving the integration of community safety initiatives, towards a crime free KwaZulu-Natal.”

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Crime is uppermost in the minds of the citizens of our Province. At the same time, I have encountered a most encouraging level of goodwill among communities and the private sector to assist in the search for solutions to the challenges we face in curbing crime. I believe that ongoing assessment and analysis of the nature of the crime problem will be critical to effectively harnessing the collaboration of all persons and entities, particularly in the context of the developmental needs of our Province.

I have previously stressed that it is imperative that as a government, we need to be listening to the community, as well as communicating with the people. Beyond simply listening, we need to actually hear what the community is saying out there in order to be fully in touch with communities' safety needs. I believe that the production of high quality applied research will be critical to discovering and interpreting the crime threats facing our Province so that we are able to respond creatively and innovatively. Specifically, I believe we need to interrogate how different social contexts and circumstances shape the daily experiences of ordinary people.

This publication focuses specifically on stock theft and explores what is driving this activity which is so adversely affecting both the delicate economy of small-scale farming as well as the commercial farming sector. We are well aware that as people lose the ability to support themselves in rural areas due to, among other things, the theft of their livestock, they are forced to move to urban areas where they experience tremendous difficulties in reconstructing a livelihood.

As this research publication has highlighted, we are now well aware of the way stock thieves are operating in our Province, both in their organised networks and the role played by local petty criminals and stock speculators. We will not relent in our efforts to deal with stock thieves and will ensure that KZN stock owners feel the protection of all organs of state and civil society.

Like with most crime types, communities are central to combating stock theft. I therefore encourage communities to raise their vigilance and continue to enhance their own target-hardening measures. As they work hand-in-hand with the authorities, and as we strengthen the comprehensive safety liaison mechanisms between communities and all agencies of peace, safety and security, we will build the infrastructure required to protect our livestock and the livelihoods which centre around them.

Mr B.H. Cele
MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison
Stock Theft in KwaZulu-Natal
Stock theft is not a new crime. It is said that it is probably as old as agriculture itself. What is of particular concern however is that certain KwaZulu-Natal towns feature prominently among the stock theft 'hotspot' areas in the country. According to police statistics, Ladysmith, Loskop, Intsikeni, Ezakheni and Bergville are among the country's top 10 hotspots. This is a situation that the KZN Department of Community Safety and Liaison is working very hard to change.

The KwaZulu-Natal province continues to develop, implement and review strategies aimed at accelerating growth in all sectors of the economy in line with the province's socio-economic blueprint, the Provincial Growth and Development Strategy (PGDS). The crime of stock theft, however, cuts across and threatens both the commercial farming sector as well as the precariously subsistence farming economy. The ripple effects of stock theft affect our province on numerous levels and the poorest rural stock owners are worst affected by the problem. Through the effective combating of property crimes such as stock theft, the KZN Department of Community Safety and Liaison believes that more people will be afforded opportunities to participate in KZN's growing economy with positive results for the province's effective and sustainable economic growth.

An additional concern relating to stock theft is that the grievances caused among otherwise peaceful communities as a result of stock theft has on occasion led to bitter and violent conflict in South Africa. The Department has prioritised the hosting of 'community dialogues' to enhance constructive community interactions and mutually beneficial resolutions to community conflicts.

This report explores the challenges of combating stock theft for the SAPS, over whom the Department has been mandated by the South African Constitution to exercise civilian oversight, as well as challenges for the rest of the criminal justice system and other role-players. Some noteworthy provincial initiatives have been highlighted which represent innovative community attempts at countering the problem. This timeous enquiry into the nature and prevalence of this crime, accompanied by practical recommendations, will go a long way in directing the resources and energy of both state and civil society role-players.

Ms Y.E. Bacus
Head of Department
KZN Department of Community Safety and Liaison
CONTENTS

- Message by MEC for Transport, Community Safety and Liaison
- Foreword by Head of KZN Department of Community Safety and Liaison
- Executive Summary

1. Introduction
2. Livestock Numbers in KZN
3. Stock Theft Statistics
4. Risk and contributing factors in relation to stock theft
   - Quick cash yield
   - Unattended grazing
   - Stock owner negligence
   - Unmarked livestock
   - Poor documentation of livestock
   - Linkages with the trade in marijuana and firearms
   - Unoccupied farms
5. Perpetrators of stock theft
6. Stock theft modus operandi
7. Destination of stolen stock
8. Stock Theft as a Potential Driver of Conflict
9. Secondary Effects of Stock Theft
10. Policing Stock theft
    - Policing challenges
11. The Performance of the Courts
12. Provincial Stock Theft Interventions
    - Underberg/Himeville District Security Co-ordination Centre (Community Watch)
    - Swartberg Stock Theft Prevention Association (SSPA)
    - KwaZulu-Natal Agricultural Union (Kwanalu): Security Desk
    - SAPS Stock Theft Awareness Programmes
13. National Stock Theft Prevention Initiatives
14. Recommendations
15. Conclusion

Endnotes
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National African Farmers Union (NAFU) KZN;

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Mr John Pearce, Underberg/Himeville District Security Co-ordination Centre (Community Watch);

Mr Koos Marais, KWANALU;

Inkosi Gumede, the Traditional Council and the community of Mashabane, Mhlabuyalingana;

Induna Mishack Mbatha and the community of Kwastanela at Hlobane, Vryheid.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

KwaZulu-Natal stations feature prominently among the stock theft hotspot stations in the country. Five KZN stations, viz. Ladysmith, Loskop, Intsikeni, Ezakheni and Bergville are among the country’s top 10 hotspot stations. Stock theft has a number of ripple effects on the economy and the poorest rural stock owners are worst affected by the problem. Moreover, the grievances caused among otherwise peaceful communities as a result of stock theft has on occasion led to bitter and violent conflict in South Africa.

From available statistics on reported stock theft cases, the incidence of both theft and recovery rates in respect of cattle have remained fairly constant over the last four reporting periods. Among the main risk and contributing factors in relation to stock theft are unattended grazing, the practice of keeping unmarked livestock and the poor documentation of livestock movements. Stock theft perpetrators include those from within the communities from where livestock is stolen to more organised cross-border networks. In some case, stock thieves are well armed and people are afraid to confront them for fear of their lives. More crime intelligence work will be necessary to uncover the true extent of syndicate-driven stock theft.

It is believed that the majority of stolen livestock is sold for the pot in townships and other densely populated residential areas. This practice of unregulated livestock trading is believed to be a crucial driver of livestock theft. Respondents in this study pointed to a number of challenges facing the criminal justice system in relation to stock theft, including the long duration of stock theft trials and the need for increased police resources and inter-component cooperation.

Some noteworthy provincial initiatives have been highlighted which represent community attempts at countering the problem. Most express the need for greater state support for stock protection. The study has made a number of recommendations regarding training of communities in stock theft prevention, improving livestock marking practices, improved documentation control for livestock in transit, improved regulation regarding the trading in livestock and an enhanced response by the criminal justice system. These will require commitment and concerted efforts by a range of stakeholders but is an extremely worthwhile endeavour when the impact of stock theft on overall human security is fully considered.
1. Introduction

Stock theft has far reaching effects. Rural communities struggle to eke out an existence from meagre incomes in a harsh rural environment. Their livestock is regarded as 'live wealth' and is often their only source of income and sustenance. Hence, when their livestock is stolen, the impact is far reaching, costing many households and small scale farmers their livelihoods. When the delicate economy of small-scale farming is disturbed, people flood to the urban areas exacerbating social problems. Stock theft also has a serious effect on the red meat industry, affecting SA's competitiveness in international markets.

Though the crime of stock theft is almost as old as agriculture itself, there are signs that stock thieves operating in SA are operating in organised networks that invariably involve local criminals. The problem affects small scale subsistence farmers the greatest because in one incident, small-scale stock farmers can lose their entire herd. While the Animal Identification Office in the Department of Agriculture reports that about 2 500 brands are registered every month, they have also pointed out that many smaller stock owners are still not marking their animals.

Police figures show that in the year to end March 2007, cattle, sheep and goats worth more than R554m were stolen from SA farmers. The SAPS Stock Theft Head Office indicates that R227m worth of this stock was recovered. Some of the stock-theft problem is concentrated in border areas possibly involving syndicates operating from Lesotho and Swaziland who are taking stock out of SA. However, internally, local criminals are also involved and these individuals steal stock for resale mainly in South Africa's urban settlements. The police figures for the year to end March 2007 show that nationally, the top three problem areas for cattle theft are Ulundi, Midlands and Uthukela in KwaZulu-Natal.

This report attempts to reflect the nature and prevalence of the stock theft problem in KZN, and highlights the prevention options which are considered most feasible. A purposive sampling technique was used to obtain qualitative data by means of questionnaires. This involved the conducting of interviews with relevant role-players and the holding of focus groups with affected communities. SAPS data on reported stock theft cases constituted the quantitative data analysed in the study.

2. Livestock Numbers in KZN

No reliable figures are available for livestock numbers in KZN, but it is believed that most cattle and goats are owned by (predominantly African) small scale subsistence farmers and individual households. The majority of sheep are owned by commercial farmers. Sheep numbers appear to be on the decline and we risk facing a situation of having to move to a greater reliance on imported meat if this trend continues.

It is believed that the re-introduction of dipping tanks would go a long way in providing a reliable record of the number of stock in a particular area. Documentation maintained at the dipping tanks would record livestock ownership and would provide some indication of changing stock levels.
3. Stock Theft Statistics

As with all crime types, reported rates do not necessarily reflect the totality of incidences of that crime since there is always a proportion of incidents which go unreported. It is believed that most small scale subsistence farmers and individual households do not report stock theft to the police but rather to the Amakhosi. However, there is no indication that accurate records are kept of these reports, or that they are forwarded to the police. Commercial farmers’ estimations of stock theft figures are higher than available official figures for reported cases.

In terms of reported cases, the available SAPS stock theft figures are as follows:

**FIGURE 1: SOUTH AFRICA: HIGHEST CATTLE THEFT PREVALENCE BY POLICE AREA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>PROVINCE</th>
<th>STOLEN</th>
<th>RECOVERED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ulundi</td>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>6437</td>
<td>3249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>5889</td>
<td>2235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Uthukela</td>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>5452</td>
<td>3045</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Eastern Highveld</td>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
<td>4951</td>
<td>2417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Eastern Free State</td>
<td>Free State</td>
<td>4028</td>
<td>1534</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: SAPS Stock Theft Unit Head Office, Pretoria, 2007

The policing areas of Ulundi, Midlands and Uthukela in KZN have the highest numbers of reported cases in the country in respect of cattle theft. According to police figures, approximately half of these numbers of cattle are recovered.

In respect of the theft of goats, the available SAPS figures are as follows:

**FIGURE 2: SOUTH AFRICA: HIGHEST GOAT THEFT PREVALENCE BY POLICE AREA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>AREA</th>
<th>PROVINCE</th>
<th>STOLEN</th>
<th>RECOVERED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Uthukela</td>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>5088</td>
<td>1212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Capricorn</td>
<td>Limpopo</td>
<td>2866</td>
<td>1023</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Midlands</td>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>2765</td>
<td>677</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mthatha</td>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td>2198</td>
<td>287</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ulundi</td>
<td>KwaZulu-Natal</td>
<td>2086</td>
<td>712</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SOURCE: SAPS Stock Theft Unit Head Office, Pretoria, 2007
The following table presents a comparative view of stock theft in KZN over the last 4 years:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2003/4</th>
<th>2004/5</th>
<th>2005/6</th>
<th>2006/7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cattle stolen</td>
<td>23175</td>
<td>21953</td>
<td>22432</td>
<td>21822</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cattle recovered</strong></td>
<td><strong>10889</strong></td>
<td><strong>9797</strong></td>
<td><strong>9751</strong></td>
<td><strong>9867</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheep stolen</td>
<td>13647</td>
<td>18083</td>
<td>5295</td>
<td>4124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sheep recovered</strong></td>
<td><strong>4975</strong></td>
<td><strong>5524</strong></td>
<td><strong>1872</strong></td>
<td><strong>1150</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goats stolen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13264</td>
<td>11905</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goats recovered</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>3616</strong></td>
<td><strong>3250</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** SAPS Stock Theft Unit Head Office, Pretoria, 2007

From the table above, theft and recovery rates in respect of both cattle and goats have remained fairly constant over the last four reporting periods. At an estimated cost of R7 500 per head of cattle, the unrecovered portion of stolen cattle in 2006/7 (11 955 cattle) had a value of just over R 89 million. Reported numbers of sheep thefts have decreased from 18083 in 2004/5 to 5295 in 2005/6 and 4124 in 2006/7.

The following table presents stock theft 'hotspot' stations in South Africa for the period 1 April 30 June 2007:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>PROVINCE</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Tsolo</td>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Qumbu</td>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ladysmith</td>
<td><strong>KwaZulu-Natal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Maluti</td>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Loskop</td>
<td><strong>KwaZulu-Natal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Intsikeni</td>
<td><strong>KwaZulu-Natal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ezakheni</td>
<td><strong>KwaZulu-Natal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mqanduli</td>
<td>Eastern Cape</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Bergville</td>
<td><strong>KwaZulu-Natal</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Siyabuswa</td>
<td>Mpumalanga</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SOURCE:** SAPS Stock Theft Unit Head Office, Pretoria, 2007

KwaZulu-Natal features prominently among the stock theft hotspot stations with five stations, viz. Ladysmith, Loskop, Insikeni, Ezakheni and Bergville, among the top 10.
4. Risk and contributing factors in relation to stock theft

- **Quick Cash Yield**

Stock theft is a lucrative practice with a quick cash yield. Typically it nets the perpetrator approximately R2500 per head of cattle within a mere 24 hours. Goats and sheep are easier to steal because of their small size. Whereas previously people might have stolen predominantly for the pot, of late, there are groups that have latched onto stock theft as a way of enriching themselves and of acquiring funds to purchase desirable items, including taxis.

There is a view that with increasing death rates and the greater number of funerals being conducted, the demand for cattle is increasing resulting in some resorting to theft to meet the demand. Some funeral parlours may be resorting to buying stolen stock to meet their obligations to clients.

It is believed that most livestock are stolen for slaughter 'for the pot' rather than to be retained alive in herds elsewhere.

- **Unattended grazing**

Changing weather patterns and overgrazing have meant that there is not enough grazing land. As a result, subsistence farmers and households owning livestock allow their animals to wander, often unattended, in search of suitable grazing land. This makes the animals more vulnerable to being stolen. The livestock also stray into commercial farmers' properties where they are sometimes impounded leading in some cases to conflicts.

Conversely, stock theft also impacts negatively on grazing patterns. Due to the threat of stock theft, animals have to be removed from preferred grazing areas to safer areas where high stock densities have resulted in the poor condition of animals and severe land degradation. The lack of fencing in many areas also facilitates stock theft.

- **Stock owner negligence**

Many stock owners allow their animals to graze unattended, often close to public roads. Some owners leave their cattle in grazing fields for long periods without counting them and stock losses are detected long after they occur, making it difficult for the police to investigate such incidents. There are incidents where fences have reportedly been stolen by community members for use at their residences which leads to livestock becoming vulnerable to theft. Moreover, due to the cultural value of owning stock, even people in urban or peri-urban settings feel the need to keep livestock despite these areas being unsuitable to keep these animals. Consequently, the livestock become vulnerable to theft due to the lack of infrastructure to properly manage their upkeep.

Like with most crime types, communities are central to combating stock theft. What is required is for communities to be vigilant, to implement adequate target-hardening measures and to cooperate with the authorities.
Unmarked livestock

The Animal Identification Act, 2002 (Act 6 of 2002) makes it compulsory to mark all cattle, sheep, goats and pigs. Hot iron brands for cattle, and tattoos for small stock, are believed to be the most cost effective ways of marking these animals. The advantages of these legal marks include:

- deterrence to stock thieves who will be less inclined to steal marked animals;
- provision of positive identification and proof of ownership;
- aid in recovery and tracing of stolen livestock.

Unmarked livestock are easier to steal because they make detection difficult. Moreover, they make legal processes more complicated and hence, cases relating to unmarked livestock are more difficult to prosecute. Marking livestock on the other hand facilitates easier identification of bona fide stock owners and improves traceability. It also aids law enforcement agencies during joint operations and roadblocks.

The marking of livestock is still a new, and sometimes resisted, concept for small scale stock owners. It is also an onerous financial burden to them since there are costs involved in applying for a registered identification mark (R120) and for the purchase of marking equipment (R150). Moreover, there is a belief that some stock owners do not brand their stock so as to avoid being traced in the event of their animals causing vehicle accidents and related damages. Others simply don't see the benefits of going through the tedious process. There may also be resentment among owners over what they perceive as the State simply imposing identification requirements to extract revenue. Possible damage to the animal hide is also believed by some to create an aversion to branding.

Stock thieves are known to brand stolen stock with a registered mark in the absence of the owner having previously branded the stock. The newly branded stock enters the legal re-sale market much easier, and in the event of disputes or court cases, forensic investigation is required to determine the time of branding.

Poor documentation of livestock

The movement of livestock without proper accompanying documentation is common-place. Enforcement of such measures presents a challenge given the sheer scale of the numbers of animals being moved on a daily basis.

Linkages with marijuana and firearms

It has been suggested that there are stock thieves from Lesotho who enter the country with marijuana and barter this for stolen livestock which they transport to Lesotho. The marijuana finds its way to Durban and other locations around the Province. Stock thieves are also known to exchange livestock for firearms.

Unoccupied farms

Unoccupied farms, particularly along the borderline, are used by stock thieves to hide stolen cattle during daylight hours. They resume the driving of the stolen animals at night to avoid detection.
5. Perpetrators of stock theft

There appears to be a chain of stock theft perpetrators that begins with members of the community from where the livestock is stolen, and ends with persons who assist with the final sale of stolen stock and the purchasers themselves. Stock traders and speculators are rife in the province and operate in a largely unregulated manner. Some speculators are believed to have 'runners' who regularly steal for them.25 Local criminals provide the critical link that enables organised individuals and groups to enter into a location and steal livestock.26 Herdsmen and farm employees have also been found to be colluding with stock thieves.27

There are indications that stock thieves may have ready buyers before the crime is committed. This is evident from the fact that stolen livestock becomes untraceable very soon after being stolen, which suggests that the animals are received by awaiting buyers and slaughtered immediately.28

In principle, abattoirs are obliged to purchase from feedlots to ensure quality. They are also subjected to stricter health regulations which prohibit them from exposing consumers to animals from questionable sources.29 However, some abattoirs do become part of the stock theft chain when they assist in the slaughter of stolen livestock, whether knowingly, or after being presented with falsified documentation. Likewise, some butcheries are involved in selling stolen livestock.30

6. Stock theft modus operandi

Loose networks of stock thieves are believed to be more common-place than well-organised syndicates. There is a strong perception that some police officials,31 local criminals and community members are involved in these criminal networks.32 Local community members are believed to collude with stock thieves by arranging pick-up points.33 In Vryheid for example, stock is taken to the Kwabanakile area from where it is transported further.34 Similarly, stock stolen in Nqutu is believed to be taken to the Mahlabana area from where it is transported elsewhere. Speculators are also believed to visit areas and gather information about stock theft opportunities.35

Farm employees have been implicated in collusion with stock thieves. Descriptions of the thefts suggest significant levels of organisation in that in many cases, trucks are involved in moving stolen animals, for example from Jozini to as far as Newcastle and Ndwele.36

Respondents also indicated that stock thieves are well armed and people are afraid to confront them for fear of their lives.37 One survey conducted among victims of crime found that 15% of victims of stock theft in the study witnessed the crime. Most (53%) said that threats were made by the perpetrators and nearly half (47%) reported the use of violence.38 Typically in such cases of armed robbery of stock, stock thieves approach a homestead, make the residents aware that they are armed and steal livestock while residents are too fearful to react.39

There are indications that there may be a limited number of organised syndicates involved in stock theft nationally. There have been incidents, for example, of stolen livestock moved by boat from the Eastern Cape to Mozambique.40 Very little is known by the stock theft prevention sector about the identity and operations of these organised syndicates. Some are believed to be operating from Lesotho and others in the Eastern Cape. More crime intelligence work will be necessary to uncover the true extent of syndicate-driven stock theft. In general, South Africa's borders are considered too porous to prevent the movement of stock out of the country.41 The presence of firearms and the
involvement of organised syndicates in stock theft make recruitment of informers and witnesses enormously difficult since these factors cause people to fear for their lives. Stock theft incidents peak during the long winter nights. In the case of the areas bordering Lesotho, it is believed that the rise in stock theft also coincides with the harvesting period for the marijuana crop (the linkages between marijuana and stock theft are discussed elsewhere in this report). Rainy days are also favoured by stock thieves presumably because of the lower risk of detection in inclement weather.

7. Destination of stolen stock

'Theft for the pot'

There are few controls over the trading in livestock. It is believed that the majority of stolen livestock is sold for the pot in townships and other densely populated residential areas. These sales are facilitated by stock speculators and traders. In addition to fuelling the theft of livestock, there are also negative health consequences of such unregulated livestock trading.

Cross-border Stock Theft

Some livestock are taken across the country's borders or to other provinces. In areas such as Bergville, there is a tendency for stock thieves to drive stolen stock across the border into Lesotho given the close geographic proximity of these livestock farms to Lesotho. However, according to respondents from the livestock farming sector, far fewer stolen livestock are being moved across the border than are traded in KZN. Stolen goats are less likely to end up across the borders, but rather tend to be sold locally.

Some stolen livestock are also taken to other Provinces where they are sold at stock auctions. These auctions are visited by Stock Theft Units from time to time and complainants are sometimes taken along to identify their stock.

8. Stock Theft as a Potential Driver of Conflict

The grievances caused among otherwise peaceful communities as a result of stock theft have on occasion led to bitter and violent conflict in South Africa. One of the more well known of such conflicts is that which occurred in the Maluti region between 1997 and 1999. As Altbeker writes:

Precisely when or where the long-running problem of inter-communal cattle-raiding and stock theft turned into something nastier is uncertain, but it may have had something to do with a rise in cattle theft within Lesotho at the same time, which may have spilled over the border. That, in its turn, may have been the result of South Africa's mines employing fewer and fewer Basutho migrants, which had exacerbated poverty. What is certain is that at some point in the mid-1990s, the age-old cycle of theft and counter-theft, which had long been integrated into communal life, was ratcheted up to a new level. Somewhere, a community, frustrated at the drip, drip, drip of its stock losses, armed itself and sent out a band of men to retrieve its stolen animals. That action, itself not wildly different from what had gone before, kicked off a rapid escalation. Perhaps the men took what did not belong to them, took more than they were owed, or used an unacceptable level of violence. Whatever it was that they did, it must have offended against a neighbouring community's code of justice and honour, and pretty soon a cycle of vengeance and violent retribution was spliced into the traditional sequence of theft and counter-theft. In the subsequent months, and years, scores of people, the precise number
unknown and unknowable, died as marauding bands waged war from the backs of their horses.

In 2006 in Gluckstad, stock thieves were killed by community members. There have also been incidents where stock thieves from Lesotho have been killed in vigilante action by South African stock theft victims. In some areas, vigilante groups such as Iskebe in Nqutu charge a fee to local residents to ‘investigate’ stock thefts and other acts of crime. Such groups have been implicated in violence against suspected persons.

9. Secondary Effects of Stock Theft

Apart from the obvious economic losses to stock owners, stock theft increases the cost of production for the agricultural sector and ultimately, food prices rise. Commercial farmers invest considerable time and effort in security measures to prevent stock theft. Some have gone to the extent of digging trenches around their farms which is costly, not completely effective and not environmentally friendly. As a result of the hazards posed by stock theft, some commercial livestock farmers are switching to game farming and others are leaving the farming sector entirely.

By far, the majority of stock theft victims in KZN are small-scale subsistence farmers and individual households. This is to be expected given the fact that this demographic grouping is believed to own most cattle and goats in the Province. The impact on the livelihood of these individuals and households, whose only wealth in many cases is their livestock, is usually ruinous.

10. Policing Stock Theft

Altbeker points out the difficulty of policing against stock theft in the Drakensberg where cross-border stock thieves operate. In these remote areas, basic necessities are not readily available to police members posted there and the experience for them is an extremely frustrating and lonely one. Moreover, it is also an incredibly physically challenging location with long hours spent in the fields lying in wait for stock thieves. Police officers working in such harsh environments suffer from persistent colds, pneumonia, TB and the flu. The recovery of stolen stock is usually not accompanied by arrests since stock thieves are typically young, fit and agile and are seldom caught. Significant cattle-farming areas such as Bergville, Winterton and Underberg, which are close to the Lesotho border, have such a topography that is extremely difficult to police. According to community members interviewed, in addition to stock recoveries by the police, some stock is recovered by stock owners and community members themselves.

Most respondents in this study commented that there is room for improvement with regard to SAPS performance in relation to stock theft. The following issues regarding the SAPS emerged from interviews:

- Patrons by the SAPS to detect stock theft must be intensified.
- The skills levels of police officers attending to stock theft cases must be improved. This includes tasks such as statement taking where attention to detail is critical to successful stock theft prosecutions.
- Much greater involvement of uniformed (VISPOL) members and other components within the police service is required to curb stock theft. Where Stock Theft Units have been successful, it is attributed to information sharing and co-operation between them and Crime

Stock Theft in KwaZulu-Natal
Prevention, Detectives and Community Service Centre (CSC) personnel.\textsuperscript{57} Hence all police members should be more vigilant with regard to stock theft and devote more time and energy to the problem in their daily functioning. For example, uniformed members must stop vehicles transporting stock to ascertain whether the consignment is above board. In practice, Stock Theft Unit members appear to be relied on disproportionately to deal with such circumstances.

The SAPS Stock Theft Units at Pietermaritzburg, Glencoe, Ladysmith, Newcastle, Nqutu and Vryheid were interviewed in this study. The skills levels in these units were found to be noteworthy with most personnel being trained Detectives who had undergone specialised stock theft investigation courses. Most stock theft units rely on 4X4 vehicles and police vast and often challenging topographical areas.

Over and above the investigation of stock theft cases, SAPS Stock Theft Units also deal with stray cattle, assist in disputes over ownership and branding, conduct inspections of abattoirs and butcheries, monitor the activities of stock traders and speculators and routinely inspect documentation relating to stock in transit in terms of sections 6, 7 and 8 of the Stock Theft Act (Act 57 of 1959).\textsuperscript{58}

Although in terms of the Animal Identification Act (Act 6 of 2002), it is the duty of stock owners to properly mark their livestock, this legislation is not strictly enforced. This is most likely due to the logistical difficulties that would be created by strict enforcement, especially in relation to the strain on limited police resources and the clogging up of court rolls.\textsuperscript{39} Also, it is believed that excessive emphasis on prosecutions for non-marking will result in small-scale stock owners becoming reluctant to report stock theft out of fear of being prosecuted for failure to properly mark their animals. This in turn may result in people resorting to kangaroo courts and other illegal and counter-productive means to deal with the problem. Instead, most SAPS Stock Theft Units promote awareness among stock owners of the advantages of marking their animals and also assist them in the process of applying for registration of identification marks.

**Policing Challenges:**

A widespread problem affecting all Stock Theft Units is that many stock owners (or persons in whose care the stock is entrusted, such as herdsmen or family members) report incidents to the police far too late. This is due to a range of factors. In some cases, there is inadequate monitoring by owners and therefore the late realisation that stock is missing. It is also due to the common practice of owners first going in search of their livestock on their own before reporting the loss to the police. In many cases late reporting is due to owners residing in cities far from where the stock is kept. In such cases, herdsmen and family members delay reporting to the police in order to first inform the stock owner of the theft, and in turn, the owner often feels that he/she has to personally return in order to report the theft to the police. During these delays, valuable clues are lost and the stock is disposed of long before the police are even alerted to the thefts.\textsuperscript{60}

**Some other key areas of policing that require attention are as follows:**

- Police units make use of livestock pounds for the safekeeping of stock during trials or until the owner is traced. The adequate provision of such pounds and fees payable need to be reviewed. For example, at the Municipal pound in Vryheid, the fee of R50 p/day is...
significantly higher than at a nearby private pound (Nooitgedacht) which charges R8p/day. Lack of adequate impounding facilities complicates the confiscation of livestock from thieves.\textsuperscript{61}

- Swaziland authorities are reportedly not inclined to report South African cattle found in that country whereas the SAPS make the effort to notify the Swaziland authorities if cattle from Swaziland is discovered in South Africa.
- Witnesses are not always traceable. In some cases they refuse to cooperate due to intimidation by stock thieves.
- Forensic investigations take long (up to 6 months).
- Stock thieves compensate victims who then withdraw cases and become un-cooperative towards the Investigating Officers.
- Complainants enter into compensation agreements with stock thieves and only report the matter to the police if the agreement is breached.
- Traditional leaders (Amakhosi) sometimes mediate stock theft cases informally and some of these cases are also only reported to the police if agreements are breached. Such delays make investigation difficult.\textsuperscript{62}

11. The Performance of the Courts

Stock theft cases take a long time to be finalised in court. Victims are discouraged from laying charges due to the constant remands and high numbers of unsuccessful prosecutions.\textsuperscript{63} The changing of Prosecutors mid-way into case proceedings also impacts negatively on such matters. Given the specialised nature of stock theft prosecutions, the skills levels of court officials dealing with these matters need to be appropriate and adequate.\textsuperscript{64} There has been a noteworthy initiative involving the training of 20 Prosecutors from Northern KZN in various aspects of stock theft.\textsuperscript{65}

However, the difficulty of prosecuting stock theft cases is well appreciated. The sheer difficulty for court officials to establish ownership of unbranded livestock, for example, is a case in point. Other difficulties include questions of establishing possession and control on the part of stock thieves.
12. Provincial Stock Theft Interventions

- Underberg/Himeville District Security Co-ordination Centre (Community Watch)

The organisation is a registered Non Profit Organisation which coordinates security in the District. It has 3 employees: 2 permanent and 1 part-time. The organisation is funded by the Himeville and Underberg farming communities.

The initiative began as “Farmwatch” in 1995, but later changed its name to ‘Community Watch’ when it shifted its focus to provide services to the entire community instead of serving only the farming sector. However, by its own admission, the organisation is still being accused by residents within the Black community of not adequately serving them. More recently, communication and interaction between Community Watch and the local Black community have improved. For example, Community Watch sponsored rain-suits to persons patrolling areas inhabited predominantly by small-scale Black stock owners.

Members of the community are located in “cells” and are connected by means of a radio network. In case of emergency, members phone Community Watch personnel who in turn contact the necessary state institutions. According to the organisation, as a result of their efforts, they currently have the stock theft problem under control. However, they feel that success has come at great financial cost to the farming community and they believe that more resources are required from the State.

- Swartberg Stock Theft Prevention Association (SSPA)

The SSPA operates in the Swartberg, Ferndale and Evatt areas. The area extends from Joyner’s Gate (provincial border between Eastern Cape and KZN) and Jonathan’s Gate (border between RSA and Sehlabateba National Park) a distance of approximately 30 km. The SSPA was formed in 1995 by farmers in the area after losing 616 cattle, 170 sheep, 27 horses, and 13 goats estimated then at R 846 000. The SSPA is a voluntary association of 22 members with annual costs of R 600 000 funded solely by members, through fund-raising initiatives (such as their annual trout fishing festival) and more recently, the association received a donation from the Agri Securitas Board for funding the radio network in Lesotho. The association’s primary function is to patrol the 30 km border fence daily and be on the lookout for stolen livestock being driven across the border. Where livestock is found to have crossed the border, the association mounts follow-up operations on horses or motorbikes to recover stolen livestock. Over the last 10 years, the association has been able to finance significant infrastructure along the Lesotho border, including access roads, border fencing, radios and containers used as guard-posts. The association has also amassed extensive knowledge of stock theft routes and other aspects relating to the prevention of cross-border stock theft.

Given that farms in the area along the border with Lesotho are owned by individuals and not by the State, the farmers erected a fence on the border with Lesotho at their own cost. The SSPA has also built a 14km access road to the Lesotho border.

The association assists emerging farmers in the Insikeni area by working to prevent livestock stolen in Insikeni from crossing into Lesotho. The value of livestock belonging to Insikeni farmers that was recovered between 2001 and 2006 is estimated at R1.8million. The association receives no financial contribution from the emerging farmers of Insikeni or from the State.
Another innovative project of the association is the setting up of liaison committees with Lesotho farmers who experience similar stock theft problems. The Lesotho farmers are said to be cooperating well. They have been provided with radios and they contact the SSPA when they observe stock being moved through their areas. The association is expanding these networks from areas along the border to other parts of Lesotho.

**KwaZulu-Natal Agricultural Union (Kwanalu) Security Desk**

During May 1998, Kwanalu established a Security Desk to assist, inter alia, with the implementation and monitoring of the Rural Protection Plan in KwaZulu-Natal. The safety of the entire rural population remains one of Kwanalu's stated priorities and the organisation caters for the needs of both members and non-members in the province. The Security Desk is responsible to the Kwanalu Board of Directors and functions under management of the organisation's Chief Executive Officer.

Kwanalu monitors and analyses stock theft statistics and has research capacity to keep abreast of developments regarding this phenomenon. They collate and disseminate data on stock theft incidents and raise awareness regarding the extent of the problem. They also participate in provincial and National fora set up to address stock theft.

**SAPS Stock Theft Awareness Programmes**

SAPS Stock Theft Units conduct awareness programmes on stock theft which cover such areas as branding and safeguarding of stock. There are also appeals made to communities to be more vigilant for stock thieves, report suspicious activities and erect and maintain fences.

### 13. National Stock Theft Prevention Initiatives

At the first Southern African Regional Conference on Stock Theft held in Pretoria from 7 - 10 May 2002, the six SARPCCO (Secretariat of the Southern African Regional Police Chiefs Cooperation Organisation) countries represented mutually agreed on the necessity of drawing up guidelines to control the movement of stock. The conference discussed the use of DNA technology to aid in the identification of individual animals for the benefit of the livestock industry. The conference resolved to prioritise the following initiatives:

- A training curriculum for member countries that will focus on prevention, investigation, detection and joint operations;
- The uniformity of legislation relating to control, movement and identification of stock with a view to harmonise these laws;
- The enhancement of bilateral operations; and
- The more efficient exchange of information, including the installation of radio and/or telephone hotlines at identified points along the borders.

At the National Rural Safety Conference hosted by the SAPS National Crime Prevention Division from 23 - 25 October 2001 in Midrand, the observation was made that improved socio-economic development would help to combat stock theft, and that building the prevention of stock theft into plans for developing rural areas is important since stock theft committed against subsistence farmers dramatically increases their poverty and vulnerability.
14. Recommendations

14.1 Capacitation of communities and Amakhosi: Like with most crime types, communities are central to combating stock theft. What is required is for communities to be vigilant, to implement adequate target-hardening measures and to co-operate with the authorities. The prevention of stock theft must be built into plans for developing rural areas.

Amakhosi need to be trained in a number of areas, including in relation to the keeping of records of stock theft cases reported to them, stock marking and stock theft prevention techniques. They must also take action against stock owners who allow their livestock to wander unattended and must encourage communities to erect and maintain adequate fencing.

14.2 Livestock marking: Unmarked livestock make stock theft easier to commit and more difficult to prosecute. Marking stock, on the other hand, facilitates easier identification of stock owners. There should thus be better enforcement of livestock marking legislation (the Animal Identification Act, Act 6 of 2002). Identification mechanisms should also be improved through research and development on stock identification (e.g. by electronic means). Livestock marking campaigns and information sessions on stock registration should be held and the number of licenced brandmark operators should be increased through more training in this field. The media should be used to educate and promote awareness.

14.3 Improved documentation of livestock: This is particularly important when livestock is being moved. At present, it is easy to fabricate sale agreements because the documents prepared by buyers and sellers of livestock to satisfy the requirements of the Stock Theft Act are not controlled in any way. Currently, the documentation may even be handwritten. Controls can be strengthened by the issuing of a prescribed form controlled by way of serial numbers. This might cause a greater administrative burden but will make it more difficult for stock thieves to fabricate documents.

The policing of livestock movement should be strengthened. Documentation pertaining to livestock in transit that contains a description of the animals and proof of ownership or authorisation for transportation must be checked more rigorously. There are also calls from the agricultural sector to restrict the hours of stock movement by prohibiting stock movement between the hours of sunset and sunrise. The hiring of stock trailers is also believed to make it easier to transport stolen livestock and controls on the hiring of stock trailers therefore needs to be considered.

14.4 Regulating the trading in livestock: The trading in livestock must be regulated. Stock traders must be licenced. There must be stricter enforcement of the maintaining of documentation regarding livestock acquisitions and sales. Communities must be encouraged to abstain from buying stolen livestock and be made aware of measures in place to regulate the trading in livestock. The reintroduction of farm inspectors will assist in maintaining better records of livestock ownership and trading.

14.5 Improved communication: Livestock owners must be part of CPFs and other community structures in order to communicate their concerns timeously to the

Stock Theft in KwaZulu-Natal
authorities. Cases must be reported timeously to the police. Communities must be made aware that it is not necessary to await the arrival of the stock owner before the matter is reported to the police; family members or herdsmen may also report the matter in the absence of the owner.

To counter the practice of victims withdrawing cases after receiving compensation from stock thieves, there should be greater awareness-raising around compensatory remedies available to victims of crime, e.g. in terms of Section 300 of the Criminal Procedure Act (Act 51 of 1977) which provides that a court may award compensation where an offence causes damage to or loss of property.

14.6 The Criminal Justice System: All role-players in the Criminal Justice System should find ways to improve and expedite the handling of stock theft cases. The training of Prosecutors that was conducted in Northern KZN should be replicated. Where possible, SAPS Stock Theft Units should receive greater support in areas such as forensic investigation.

There must not be an over-reliance on SAPS Stock Theft Units to combat stock theft. Instead, Station commissioners and other police management must encourage all police members to be vigilant for stock theft and assist in the detection thereof by conducting vehicle checks and verifying ownership. The Road Traffic Inspectorate (RTI) and SPCA should also be requested to monitor stock movements and conduct checks.

14.7 Fencing and cabling of borders: International border fences should be upgraded, and passes into areas such as Lesotho should be ‘cabled’ to prevent stock being driven across the border.77

14.8 Unoccupied farms (including government owned land): Legislation to enforce owner-responsibility and accountability is required. The involvement of local communities (such as in the SAPS’ “Operation Community”) as well as traditional leadership and informers is crucial. An audit of uninhabited farms must be maintained and mechanisms developed to monitor vacant land that could possibly be used to conceal stolen livestock.
15. Conclusion

KwaZulu-Natal stations feature prominently among the stock theft hotspot stations in the country with five stations, viz. Ladysmith, Loskop, Insikeni, Ezakheni and Bergville, among the country's top 10. Stock theft has a number of ripple effects on the economy and the poorest rural stock owners are worst affected by the problem. Moreover, the grievances caused among otherwise peaceful communities as a result of stock theft has on occasion led to bitter and violent conflict in South Africa.

From available stock theft statistics, the incidence of both theft and recovery rates in respect of cattle have remained fairly constant over the last four reporting periods. Among the main risk and contributing factors in relation to stock theft are: unattended grazing, the practice of keeping unmarked livestock and the poor documentation of livestock movements. Stock theft perpetrators include those from within the communities from where livestock is stolen to more organised cross-border networks. In some case, stock thieves are well armed and people are afraid to confront them for fear of their lives. More crime intelligence work will be necessary to uncover the true extent of syndicate-driven stock theft.

It is believed that the majority of stolen livestock end up sold by stock traders in townships and other densely populated residential areas. In addition to fuelling the theft of livestock, this practice of unregulated livestock trading has negative health consequences. Several policing and justice system improvements have been suggested.

Some noteworthy provincial initiatives have been highlighted which represent communities' attempts at countering the problem. Most express the need for greater government intervention, but like with most crime types, the involvement of ordinary community members in affected areas is critical. What is urgently required is for communities to be more vigilant, to implement adequate target-hardening measures and to co-operate with the authorities.

The study has made a number of recommendations regarding training of communities, improving livestock marking practices, improved documentation of livestock particularly when moved, improved regulation regarding the trading in livestock and better response by the criminal justice system. Improved socio-economic development will no doubt go a long way in combating stock theft. The prevention of stock theft must be built into plans for developing rural areas since stock theft committed against subsistence farmers dramatically increases their poverty and vulnerability. These will require commitment and concerted efforts by a range of stakeholders, but is an extremely worthwhile endeavour when the impact of stock theft on overall human security is fully considered.
Endnotes

1 Shannon Sherry, Financial Mail, 15 December 2006.
3 Shannon Sherry, op. cit.
4 Shannon Sherry, op. cit.
6 Purposive sampling involves the selection of 'information rich' cases and is used to study the lived experience of a specific population, or when the population for a study is highly unique.
7 National African Farmers Union (NAFU) KZN, 10 September 2007, interview with Dr Mandla Buthelezi (1st Vice-President of NAFU and President of NAFU KZN), Mr Mdu Kubheka (NAFU KZN Operations Director) and Ms Lindi Manqele (Co-ordinator: NAFU Ntonjoneni).
8 NAFU KZN, op. cit.
9 NAFU KZN, op. cit.
10 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 23 October 2007.
11 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 24 October 2007.
12 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 23 October 2007.
13 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 26 October 2007.
14 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 23 October 2007.
15 NAFU KZN, op. cit.
17 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 18 October 2007.
18 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 18 October 2007.
19 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 23 October 2007.
20 Department of Agriculture, 2006, Animal Identification in terms of Animal Identification Act, Pretoria.
23 Ken Dorning, farmer and member of the Swartberg Stock Theft Prevention Association, interviewed on 12 September 2007, Underberg.
24 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 26 October 2007.
25 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 18 October 2007.
26 NAFU KZN, op. cit.
27 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 18 October 2007.
28 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 24 October 2007.
29 NAFU KZN, op. cit.
30 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 24 October 2007.
31 Respondents at Mashabane Tribal Area, Mhlabuyalingana made allegations of collusion and bribery against the police. Specific details would need to be obtained and the allegations verified.
32 Focus group at Mashabane Tribal Area, Mhlabuyalingana, held on 19 September 2007 with Inkosi Gumede, Traditional Council, Councillor of Ward 13, CPF Chair - Mr Mabika and community members.
33 Focus group at Mashabane Tribal Area, op. cit.
34 SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 18 October 2007.
36 Focus group at Mashabane Tribal Area, op. cit.
37 Focus group at Hlobane, Vryheid, held on 20 September 2007 with Induna Mishack Mbatha of Kwastanela (Hlobane) and community members.
39 Underberg/Himeville District Security Co-ordination Centre (Community Watch), 12 September 2007,
Underberg/Himeville District Security Co-ordination Centre (Community Watch), op.cit.


Ken Dorning, op. cit.

Focus group at Mashabane Tribal Area, op. cit.

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Koos Marais, KWANALU, pers. comm. 12 September 2007.

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SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 23 October 2007.

Altbeker, A. op. cit.

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SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 24 October 2007.

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Underberg/Himeville District Security Co-ordination Centre (Community Watch), op.cit.

Underberg/Himeville District Security Co-ordination Centre (Community Watch), op.cit.

Underberg/Himeville District Security Co-ordination Centre (Community Watch), op.cit.

Inspector Mort Mortasagne of the Newcastle Stock Theft Unit conducted this training on 7 September 2007. It was well received by the NPA.

Underberg/Himeville District Security Co-ordination Centre (Community Watch), op.cit.

Ken Dorning, op. cit.

Ken Dorning, op. cit.

Ken Dorning, op. cit.

SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 18 October 2007.

SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 24 October 2007.


A number of these recommendations emerged at a Stock Theft Workshop jointly hosted by the KZN Provincial Departments of Community Safety and Liaison and Agriculture and Environmental Affairs on 30 August 2007.

SAPS Stock Theft Unit Interview, 26 October 2007.

NAFU KZN, op. cit.

Koos Marais, KWANALU, pers. comm. 12 September 2007.

Stock Theft in KwaZulu-Natal
Crime and personal safety are very pertinent in the minds of South Africans. The mission of the KZN Department of Community Safety & Liaison (DCSL) is that the people of KwaZulu-Natal live in a safe and secure environment. This publication is one of a range of products that the DCSL has produced in order to enhance our understanding of the dynamics of crime in KwaZulu-Natal, as well as to inform the Department's numerous crime prevention programmes. Given the intimate and private contexts in which inter-personal crime is occurring, the DCSL prioritises the social crime prevention approach in its programmes. Initiatives underway by the Department include the training of youth in spearheading community-based crime prevention, improving services to vulnerable groups and victims/survivors of crime, and general awareness-raising that crime is a societal problem which requires a concerted societal response.

Topics already covered include:

- Family Violence
- School Violence
- Stock Theft

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