



RESPONSE TO PARLIAMENT QUESTIONS

BY

SANET STEENKAMP, MP

MINISTER

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

JUNE 2026

I rise in this August House to respond to the question asked by **Hon. Swartbooi of LPM**, in relation to Shark Island.

Response on Shark Island Development Proposal

Shark Island was declared a National Heritage Site in 2019, with the public announcement made on 11 March 2020 to raise awareness of its significance. As such, all development proposals require prior approval from the National Heritage Council of Namibia (NHC), a statutory body under the Ministry of Education, Innovation, Youth, Sports, Arts and Culture, mandated to conserve and protect heritage resources.

Before providing responses to the specific questions on Shark Island, it is important, Honourable Members, for me to first navigate a broader fundamental question, which is "*Can Heritage Conservation and Development Co-Exist?*" The answer is yes!

Heritage conservation and economic development are often presented as competing objectives. However, international experience demonstrates that they can co-exist; provided that development is guided by the principles of sustainable development, integrated spatial planning, and heritage-sensitive design. Rather than viewing heritage sites as obstacles to growth, they can be incorporated into development strategies that generate economic, cultural, educational, and tourism benefits.

The challenge for Namibia regarding the potential expansion of the port at Shark Island is therefore not whether development should occur, but how development can occur while preserving the site's historical, cultural, and memorial significance.

Honourable Members,

The experience of Robben Island, Stone Town, Mozambique Island, Elmina Castle, Pearl Harbor, and Portsmouth demonstrates that heritage conservation and major infrastructure development are not mutually exclusive. The key lesson is that development must be designed around heritage values rather than replacing them.

These international examples demonstrate that economic development and heritage conservation can be mutually reinforcing when governments adopt integrated planning frameworks. The most relevant lesson for Namibia is that sites associated with difficult histories, war, colonialism, slavery, or human suffering can be protected while allowing adjacent economic infrastructure to expand.

For Shark Island, if endorsed by the National Heritage Council (NHC), the most sustainable approach would be a heritage-sensitive port expansion strategy in which the core memorial landscape is preserved and enhanced, while Namport's expansion occurs through carefully planned buffer zones, alternative infrastructure layouts, and rigorous heritage impact assessments. Such a model would allow Namibia to pursue economic growth

while safeguarding one of the country's most historically significant sites for future generations.

To answer specific questions:

1. Any proposed development at a declared heritage site, including Shark Island or any other heritage site in Namibia, must be accompanied by a Heritage Impact Assessment (HIA) that outlines potential impacts and recommends mitigation measures. The HIA for the proposed expansion was submitted, reviewed, and formally rejected by the Nantal Heritage Council (NHC) on 31 July 2024 due to the site's sensitive heritage status. NHC was further informed by Namport, that the rejection was premature, pending completion of critical studies such as underwater, noise, and visual impact assessments.

Namport subsequently submitted a comprehensive application in April 2026 for the National Heritage Council's consideration, accompanied by a number of specialist studies, including a Visual Impact Assessment, Noise Impact Assessment, and an Underwater Archaeological Assessment. The application is currently before council for consideration. The outcome of this evaluation will be communicated through appropriate channels.

2. The site is already a declared heritage site within the purview of the National Heritage Act (No.27 of 2004), and the Ministry, through its organ, NHC, will ensure its status is protected.

3. a) Following Cabinet Resolution 20th/09.11.21/016 to transfer the management of Shark Island from Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR) to the NHC, a technical committee was established to implement this decision. The aim is to manage the site in a manner befitting its dignity and heritage significance, rather than as a recreational campsite.

Once management is formally transferred, NHC's plan for Shark Island include guided and unguided tours (to promote public understanding on the significance of the site), the establishment of a museum (budgeted at N\$400,000 for 2025/26),

b) The Ministry, in collaboration with its stakeholders, has initiated discussions on the potential nomination of Shark Island to the World Heritage List under the framework of the 1972 Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. The outcome of these discussions will inform subsequent actions, including the commissioning of further research and the preparation of a nomination dossier for submission to UNESCO through the World Heritage Centre.

c) The National Heritage Council, through its Heritage Education Programme, will continue to raise awareness about the site's significance and educate the public on activities that are compatible with the preservation of its heritage values. To date, three stakeholder meetings have been held (2 July, 28 July, and 29 July 2024); the meeting of 29th July brought together several stakeholders involving! Aman Community, Namport, NTLA, and the Ovaherero Genocide Foundation, among others. Deliberations covered the transfer process, NHC's future management plans, Namport's proposed development, and stakeholder contributions. The Ministry and NHC will continue to organise similar consultation meetings in order to ensure that the public and stakeholders are informed of all developments in respect of Shark Island.

4. In line with Section 58 of the National Heritage Act (No. 27 of 2004), the NHC will develop a Conservation and Management Plan for Shark Island in consultation with key stakeholders. This plan will mitigate risks, prevent destruction, support informed decision-making, and enhance interpretation of the site's heritage values.

5. Heritage places are designated as such to provide for their protection and sustainability so that current generations can utilise them in ways that befits their significance. It is not news to me that the Nama and Herero communities hold commemorative events on Shark Island. The Ministry has

supported these communities with transport (to and from these commemorative events) and through the participation of senior government officials who presented statements as well forming part various public lectures organised during these events. The Ministry's participation demonstrates its recognition of the need for current generations to cultivate a culture of commemorations, which will be passed on to future generations. The Ministry and the NHC remain committed to safeguarding the integrity of Shark Island and ensuring its heritage is preserved for present and future generations.

I thank you.