

THOUSANDS IN DIRE STRAITS

Defaulting owners take forced sale option

Kamini Padayachee and Lungelo Mkamba

CASH-trapped homeowners in Kwa-Zulu-Natal are opting to let their properties go through bank-approved forced sales, rather than their being repossessed.

Estate agency Chas Everitt said sales of this type accounted for 30 percent of its sales between June last year and July this year.

Another estate agency reported selling at least 30 "distressed" properties in the past three months as desperate homeowners battled under the strain of a global economic recession, job losses and high debt levels.

In a recent judgment involving applications by Absa against three defaulting homeowners, Durban High Court Acting Judge Peter Olsen noted that national statistics provided by Absa "indicate the extent of the problem with which the bank is confronted".

The figures showed that more than 5 000 section 129 notices – notifying consumers they were in default – had been sent out between December

Annatie Angelo, owner and principal of Harcourt Tops, based in Pinetown, agreed that distressed sales were becoming prevalent. In the past three months, the agency had sold 30 such homes.

Greg Wilson, of Claudine Hickman Properties, said 20 percent of sales by the group's Queensburgh office were distressed sales.

"It is more widespread than that and is occurring in a lot of areas."

An employee at auction company Peter Maskell Auctioneers said many people were selling their second homes or holiday properties, especially on the South Coast.

The company had carried out several valuations in Kloof, which was the first step when a bank intended to take legal action against the homeowner.

Pam Golding Properties' national general manager, Richard Day, said distressed sales were occurring across the province and high-value properties in the traditional greater Durban North and Highway areas were not immune to lifestyle changes.

Barriers



Staff from the Shemungwe game capture company, from left, Mlu Khanyile, Vincent Simbizi and Mthoko Khumalo, attend to two of the sedated antelope which have been moved to the Gelukwater reserve near Babanango.

Private game reserve passes the buck

Tony Carnie

FOUR endangered antelopes have been caught and moved from a private game reserve in the Lady Smith area to offer them a better chance of survival in another reserve in the Ulundi district.

It is thought that there are less than 2 500 of these small-bodied oribi antelopes left in KwaZulu-Natal and about 4 000 nationwide, although exact figures are not known.

The four oribi, two males and two females, were darted

and captured in the Nambiti private game reserve near Ladysmith recently and moved to the Gelukwater oribi reserve near Babanango.

A spokesman for the Nambiti reserve said the Endangered Wildlife Trust assisted with the relocation project.

"These small antelope are easily caught and killed by predators, and because of this, it was decided to remove them from Nambiti and donate them to the Gelukwater reserve," reserve officials said.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife ecol-

ogist Athol Marchant estimates that there are about 600 oribi protected in Ezemvelo reserves and less than 2 000 on privately owned land.

"Oribi are classified as 'endangered' in the *S4 Mammals Red Data Book* and they are very vulnerable to organised dog-hunts.

"Most of these antelope survive on private land and we try to encourage farmers to leave corridors between their properties to allow these animals to move and breed with other small populations on neigh-

bouring land," Marchant said.

Ecologists say the animals feed selectively on short grasses but also need tall grasses to shelter themselves and their young from predators. Unfortunately, its favoured habitat is the same type of terrain best-suited to crop farming and timber plantations.

Ezemvelo surveys over the past two decades have shown that several small oribi populations have declined or become locally extinct, especially on farms with groups of less than 10 oribi.