



KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE

**ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM
AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE MEC

Private Bag X 07, Cascades, Pietermaritzburg, 3202
191 Hoosen Haffeejee Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201
Enquiries: Mr. T Dlamini
Email: Thabiso.Dlamini@kznedtea.gov.za
Tel: 081 447 5139

Programme/Sub-Programme: Office of the MEC

**THE HONORABLE MS. NONTEMBEKO BOYCE
SPEAKER OF THE KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCIAL LEGISLATURE
241 LANGALIBALELE STREET
PIETERMARITZBURG
3200**

WRITTEN RESPONSE

**NO. 125/2026 MS H LIDGETT (DA) TO ASK THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
TOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**

The following memorandum serves as a response to the KZN Legislature enquiry No. 125/2026, as addressed to the MEC: Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs. The response is stated as follows:

- 1. CAN THE MEC CONFIRM WHETHER THE FIVE SUSPECTED RHINO POACHERS KILLED NEAR HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED, AND**
 - (a) IF SO, WILL THE MEC PROVIDE THEIR NAMES, PLACES OF ORIGIN, AND WHETHER ANY OF THEM WERE PREVIOUSLY LINKED TO RHINO-POACHING CASES OR SYNDICATES.**

The matter concerning the identification of the five suspected rhino poachers killed near Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park remains under investigation. As such, any enquiries in this regard should be directed to SAPS Hluhluwe under case number CAS 35/05/2026.
- 2. HAS EDTEA OR EZEMVELO ESTABLISHED WHETHER THE SUSPECTS WERE ACTING AS LOCAL FOOT SOLDIERS, PART OF AN ORGANISED SYNDICATE, OR LINKED TO A BROADER TRAFFICKING NETWORK, AND**
 - (A) WHAT STEPS ARE TAKEN WITH SAPS TO IDENTIFY THE HIGHER-LEVEL ORGANISERS BEHIND THIS INCIDENT.**

As mentioned above, this is a policing and criminal investigation matter under the authority of the SAPS. EDTEA and Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife continue to cooperate fully with SAPS in this regard, and all related enquiries should be referred to SAPS.

3. GIVEN THAT THE SUSPECTS WERE REPORTEDLY FOUND WITH A HUNTING RIFLE FITTED WITH A SILENCER AND TWO PISTOLS, WHAT DOES THIS INCIDENT TELL EDTEA ABOUT THE CURRENT LEVEL OF THREAT FACING HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK AND ITS RANGERS?

The incident underscores the persistent and sophisticated threat facing Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park and its dedicated Field Rangers. Despite ongoing conservation efforts, poaching pressure on the park remains significant. From 1 January to 31 May 2026, the following incidents were recorded:

INCIDENT	OCCURRENCE
Evidence of poacher activity	33
Poacher sightings	24
Incursions detected	12
Shots reported	22
Interceptions of poachers	3
Rhino carcasses	10
Arrests linked to HIP	9

4. WHAT IS THE CURRENT STATUS OF RHINO DEHORNING AT HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK?

Maintenance dehorning is conducted annually at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park to sustain the dehorned status of all rhinos in the park.

5. SINCE DEHORNING HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS ONE OF THE INTERVENTIONS CONTRIBUTING TO THE REDUCTION IN RHINO POACHING, WHAT MEASURABLE IMPACT HAS EDTEA SEEN AT HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI, AND

(a) HOW IS THIS BEING MONITORED ALONGSIDE INTELLIGENCE-LED POLICING, RANGER DEPLOYMENT AND TECHNOLOGY?

Dehorning has formed part of a broader suite of interventions that have contributed to a substantial reduction in rhino poaching at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. Comparative data on rhino poaching mortalities illustrates this positive trend. Below is the HIP Monthly Comparative Rhino Poaching mortalities for 2023, 2024, 2025 as of 31 May 2026.

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOT
2023	18	17	21	28	26	25	20	27	28	44	23	30	307
2024	19	43	30	32	7	4	8	4	10	20	13	8	199
2025	4	2	4	5	6	2	6	13	5	11	2	3	63
2026	0	1	6	1	2								

Dehorning operations commenced on 1 April 2024. Year-to-date mortalities for 1 January to 31 May 2026 show a 52% reduction compared to the same period in 2025.

a) These outcomes are monitored through a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach under the Ezemvelo Rhino Guardianship Strategy. This strategy integrates intelligence-led policing, ranger deployment, and technology, and involves all key stakeholders, particularly SAPS. Coordination occurs through established monthly forums, including:

- SAPS National Joints Wildlife Tracking Forum
- SAPS Provincial Priority Committee on Wildlife Trafficking
- Intelligence Coordinating Committee
- Provincial Biodiversity Investigators Forum

These platforms ensure intelligence-driven investigations, targeted prevention operations, and special investigation projects.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife would appreciate dedicated budgetary support to implement proven anti-poaching interventions, including rhino dehorning, integrity testing, and the utilisation of drone technology.

6. ARE THERE COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS CURRENTLY IN PLACE AROUND HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK TO PREVENT RECRUITMENT INTO POACHING NETWORKS?

Yes. EDTEA through Ezemvelo, implements a range of community-based interventions around Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park. These programmes aim to prevent recruitment into poaching networks by fostering awareness of the negative impacts of rhino poaching, promoting alternative livelihoods, and building stronger partnerships with neighbouring communities.

Key initiatives include environmental education and awareness campaigns, skills development and training programmes, support for sustainable resource use, and community engagement projects that highlight the socio-economic benefits of rhino conservation and responsible tourism. These efforts seek to reduce human-wildlife conflict and discourage participation in illegal activities by demonstrating tangible community benefits from conservation.

7. HOW IS EDTEA MEASURING WHETHER THESE PROGRAMMES ARE ACTUALLY REDUCING POACHING PRESSURE?

The effectiveness of these community programmes is rigorously monitored through an integrated, data-driven approach. All rhino poaching incidents and associated poaching effort data are systematically logged into the national CMORE database. This enables detailed tracking of trends and the correlation between community interventions and changes in poaching pressure.

Monthly statistics are presented to joint wildlife compliance forums, including provincial structures, ensuring multi-stakeholder oversight. In addition, formal reports are regularly submitted to Ezemvelo's Executive and Management Committees for strategic review and adaptive management.

While rhino poaching is a syndicated crime with recruitment occurring across the province and country, the substantial reductions in poaching mortalities observed at Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park, including a 52% year-to-date decrease in 2026 compared to 2025, reflect the positive contribution of this holistic strategy, of which community engagement forms a critical component. Ongoing evaluation continues in close collaboration with SAPS and other stakeholders to further strengthen these interventions.

Ezemvelo remains committed to enhancing community partnerships as part of its broader Rhino Guardianship Strategy to achieve long-term, sustainable reductions in rhino poaching.

8. DOES EDTEA BELIEVE ITS CURRENT PARTNERSHIP MODEL WITH SURROUNDING COMMUNITIES IS STRONG ENOUGH TO DISRUPT RHINO-POACHING SYNDICATES BEFORE THEY ENTER THE PARK?

Local communities near HIP are key recruitment pools for syndicates. Programs providing jobs, education, benefits from conservation, and intelligence networks have prevented incursions by offering advance warnings before poachers enter.

While community partnerships are an essential component of the anti-poaching strategy, the effectiveness of efforts to disrupt syndicates is therefore assessed within the broader context of all crime prevention strategies employed across KwaZulu-Natal, in close collaboration with SAPS and other law enforcement agencies. Also, all this information is uploaded on CMORE database and becomes accessible for analysis.

9. WHAT INTEGRITY-TESTING MEASURES ARE CURRENTLY IN PLACE FOR STAFF, CONTRACTORS AND SERVICE PROVIDERS OPERATING IN AND AROUND HLUHLUWE-IMFOLOZI PARK?

Ezemvelo maintains a robust Integrity Testing Policy, supported by a Standard Operating Procedure for polygraph testing, which applies to staff, contractors, and service providers operating in and around Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Park.

10. HAS EDTEA IDENTIFIED ANY INTERNAL LEAKS, COLLUSION OR SECURITY BREACHES LINKED TO RECENT RHINO-POACHING INCIDENTS?

Ezemvelo currently has an integrity testing policy with a standard operating procedure for polygraphing. Please see summary table below:

Summary Polygraphs in HIP

	Management (from CEO down)	iMfolozi Field Staff and Law Enforcement	Hluhluwe Contract Field Staff	Hluhluwe Field Staff and Law Enforcement
Polygraph Briefing and testing	14 May 2024.	29 November 2024		23 to 29 June 2025
Staff were polygraphed	60	54	16	36
Staff showed detection	4	14	1	6
Re-Polygraph	4	14	0	5
Result	Staff moved away from Rhino reserves while the matter is with SAPS, NPA, HAWKS.	Staff moved away from Rhino reserves while the matter is with SAPS, NPA, HAWKS.	No re- polygraph No appointment	2 refused re- polygraph

Total polygraphs Ezemvelo 166

Total deceptions 24 (15% deception rate)

Cost: R759.00 each (Total costs = R153 000.00)

Ezemvelo continues to work closely with SAPS on any potential internal leaks, collusion, or security breaches linked to rhino poaching incidents. All credible information is shared with

SAPS for further investigation. These measures form part of Ezemvelo's ongoing commitment to maintaining the highest standards of integrity and security in rhino conservation efforts.

COMPILED BY  _____ MR SIHLE MKHIZE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER EZEMVELO KZN WILDLIFE DATE: <u>12.06.2026</u>	SUPPORTED BY: _____ DR B R DLAMINI CHIEF DIRECTOR: ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SERVICES DATE: _____
RECOMMENDED BY: _____ DR. N.G. ZULU HEAD OF DEPARTMENT DATE: _____	APPROVED BY: _____ REV. K.M. ZONDI, MPL MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM & ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS DATE: _____