

## Fencing Etosha to prevent poaching

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**IN a move to control rhino poaching, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism started constructing a proper boundary fence to protect animals in the Etosha National Park.**

The fencing is expected to cost an estimated N\$700 000 per kilometre. Etosha measures 824 kilometres, and the ministry would need about N\$576 million to fence it all.

The ministry, however, does not have enough funds for the project and has requested an additional N\$167 million during this financial year. It was allocated about N\$643 million in the 2015/2016 national budget.

In the past the ministry would get N\$40 million per year for this project, but environment minister Pohamba Shifeta argued during his budget motivation in the National Assembly that the ministry needs more funds for the erection of the game-proof fence in Etosha.

At the time, Nampa reported that Shifeta said the ministry has been erecting the fence in question since 2011 but only 97 kilometres of the northern boundary has been fenced. This means it will take the ministry more than 10 years to complete the entire 824 kilometre fence.

“Our efforts to fight poaching in Etosha will be futile unless we upgrade this fence as criminals now have unhindered access in and out of Etosha,” he stated, adding that increasing damage and vandalism to the southern and western fences have been observed in recent years.

During a visit to the park on Thursday, it was established by The Namibian that 112 kilometres of the 824 km has been covered. Shifeta urged the contractor to do quality work, “otherwise government will not give you money.”

Police patrol are also visible as they do rounds in the park to watch out for poachers, while some are camping in the bushes around the park.

Some staff members have also been rotated, in a move to improve efficiency and effectiveness of patrols, especially in cases where there were repeated incidents of poaching.

The director of parks and wildlife management, Colgar Sikopo, said they have not had any new cases of poaching in the past four weeks. “We have active police patrol. We are hard at work to ensure that it (poaching) stops for good,” Sikopo said.

Shifeta however expressed concern with the owners of three farms, who have extended or joined their fences with Etosha saying a 10 metre distance apart is required.

“It's illegal, they must remove it within a week. It's prohibited by the law. They want to save money, so they join their fence to the park. We need to patrol inside and outside the boundaries, and this will be hindered by the additional fence of farmers in the area,” he asserted.

King of Ongandjera Johannes Mupongolitha Tweuthigilwa yajafet Mupiya has been identified as one of the people who needs to remove and distance his fence from that of the park. “King or not. They must remove it.” Shifeta said.

Some workers, who were busy erecting the fence, told The Namibian that they are understaffed, which puts too much pressure on them. They were informed the same day that the ministry was still in the process of recruiting more people. For now, about 40 people work on the southern fence.

The Namibian also established that there are some guards being investigated at the park in connection with the poaching, but Shifeta refused to shed more light or say how many are being investigated.

The ministry and police are carrying out post-mortems on all rhino carcasses found so far. Six suspects have been arrested in connection with poaching in the northern parts of the country.

Two white rhino carcasses discovered on a farm in the Otjozondjupa region last month increased the losses through poaching in Namibia to 62 rhinos this year. Of these, 54 were discovered in the Etosha National Park.