



## 61 rhinos butchered for their horns in three months in KZN

*Lack in filling critical vacancies, such as game rangers, had contributed to the current rhino poaching statistics. File Picture: Michael 't Sas-Rolfes*

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**Durban - A total of 61 rhinos were killed for their horns in KwaZulu-Natal between January 1, 2022, and March 25, 2022.**

This was revealed by the KZN Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (Edtea) in a parliamentary written question.

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DA KZN Edtea spokesperson Heinz de Boer had asked MEC Ravi Pillay about the province's rhino poaching issues.

Pillay revealed that 97 rhinos were poached in Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife reserves in 2021. He also revealed that 61 rhinos were poached in Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife reserves between January 1, 2022, and March 25, 2022.

According to Pillay, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife attributed the poaching incidents to a number of reasons which include “capacity constraints, limited funding, adjacent communities’ vulnerability to being enticed to collude, and more organised criminal networks”.

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Pillay said Edtea did believe that a lack in filling critical vacancies, such as game rangers, had contributed to the current rhino poaching statistics. He added that Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife had plans to curb the ongoing poaching in light of stagnant budgets.

“Ezemvelo has put in place a turnaround strategy that is due to be presented at the Provincial Executive Council, which includes motivation for increasing field ranger capacity, improving crime intelligence and linkages with other law enforcement entities, exploring dehorning potential, reviving provincial priority crime structures to improve on intelligence and data sharing, and introducing other sophisticated tracking and tracing of criminals, their devices and movement,” Pillay said.

Reacting to the statistics and information provided by Pillay in the response, De Boer said Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife was considering initial proposals submitted by the DA in a bid to curb rhino poaching.

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“The KZN Provincial Executive will now consider a host of crime-fighting and anti-rhino poaching techniques. The vast majority have been reiterated repeatedly at portfolio committee and legislative meetings, yet have to date been ignored. This includes a DA proposal to form a multidisciplinary anti-poaching task team,” De Boer said.

He said official records said 61 rhinos were poached between January 1, 2022, and March 25, 2022, but unofficially, the number now stood at close to 80.

“The statistics make for a horrifying scenario of ongoing bloodshed in our province and all indications are that this year’s figures will far outstrip the 97 rhinos poached in 2021,” De Boer said.

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He said Ezemvelo management had now proposed the following:

- Increased field ranger capacity.
- The involvement of crime intelligence and “other law enforcement entities”.
- Reviving provincial priority crime structures to improve intelligence.

“This response is a slap in the face to the public and conservationists who have for years lamented the poor co-operation between various law enforcement entities and Ezemvelo,” De Boer said.

He added that dedicated crime intelligence operatives, who apprehended and shot armed poachers, were systematically worked out of the SAPS, while an electronic anti-poaching nerve centre in the Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park is largely dysfunctional.

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“The only positive when it comes to KZN’s Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs’ response to the recent poaching surge is a candid admission that the failure to fill critical vacancies has contributed to the poaching crisis.

“Edtea MEC Ravi Pillay and his political cohort now need to make speedy budgetary interventions to not only fill vacancies but also properly equip more rangers and capacitate existing staff. The current proposed budget simply does not do enough to save this species,” De Boer said.

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