

Poachers face full might of the law in Skukuza court

The hefty sentences will send a message that going into the park to hunt illegally is dangerous and might lead to death, serious injury, and loss of freedom.

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Tumelo Waga Dibakwane 2 minutes read



Skukuza Regional Court. Insert: Isaac Phaahla.
> Photo: Supplied

The reopening of the Skukuza Regional Court is producing positive results, with a 100% conviction rate for rhino poachers over the past two years.

The court had been closed by the Mpumalanga Regional Court president Naomi Engelbrecht in August 2019, who wanted it to be moved to Mhala Court about 100 kilometres from Skukuza. However, this decision was overruled and the court was reopened again in April 2021.

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Isaac Phaahla, the general manager of marketing and communication for the Kruger National Park, said they are happy with the current sentences being given to poachers, and he believes that it will also assist in decreasing poaching in the park.



Isaac Phaahla. > Photo: Supplied

“The hefty sentences will send a message that going into the park to hunt illegally is dangerous and might lead to death, serious injury, and loss of freedom. We currently have a 100% conviction rate, which is very commendable, considering that these poachers hire the best lawyers, but lose the cases.”

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According to Phaahla, the Skukuza Regional Court recently sentenced Mozambican national Mike Nyathi to 53 years in prison on March 18. Meanwhile, on Thursday March 24, four other poachers were sentenced to 16 years' imprisonment by the same court.

"Crime does not pay. People should think about the damage they are doing to the nature and to communities who benefit from tourism. We are confident that with the functioning of the court in the park, they will deal with the poachers until they stop."

A provincial police spokesperson, Brig Selvy Mohlala, echoed Phaahla's sentiments by saying working with the justice system and the parks will assist in curbing the practice of poaching.

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"With the court sending these poachers to prison for a long time, we believe they will reduce and deter potential poachers. As police, we will not have any mercy on poachers, but will arrest them. We are also pleading with members of the public to report any suspected poaching to the nearest police station," he said.

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