



## Key to the fight against rhino poaching is the ‘institutional recovery’ of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, says Environmental Affairs MEC

*The iSimangaliso Wetland Park is one of the most important refuges for the country's rhino population. Picture: Supplied.*

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**DURBAN -** Since the beginning of the year, 106 rhinos have already been poached according to KwaZulu-Natal Economic Development, Tourism, and Environmental Affairs (Edtea) MEC Ravi Pillay.

In a statement on Saturday, Pillay said this comes after a total of 93 rhinos were poached in KZN parks in 2020 and 102 were poached last year.

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He said this year's figures indicate a severe syndicated operation and brazenness level.

The MEC said security forces are responding and there is an increased number of rangers deployed. However, he said, the department is aware that it is only provincial, national and international co-ordinated responses that will have a long-term effect.

Pillay said Premier Sihle Zikalala has tasked his department with processing and implementing recommendations of the report by the Task Team on Rhino Poaching in KZN. He said this is a work in progress.

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"It is my considered opinion that it will not be in the public interest to release the report into the public domain at this stage. Indeed, the authors specifically classify important parts of the report because of the sensitive nature concerning its impact on further investigations," he said.

Pillay said the report is receiving attention and will require a multi-disciplinary approach between Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, the National Department of Environmental Affairs, SAPS, NPA and State Security.

The MEC added that a former police officer who served on the KwaMsane Tactical Response Team, Sizwe Buthelezi, was sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment in the Durban Regional Court for possession of rhino horn and unlicensed firearms, in February.

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"There is indeed suspicion of collusion between criminal syndicates and those tasked with conservation," said Pillay.

He said the department does recognise that the starting point in the anti-rhino poaching effort in the province is within Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. T

"This entity has been in a poor state of affairs for some time leading to the former board's dissolution," he said.

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Due to last month's floods, Pillay said the process of appointing the new board was interrupted. He said the appointment of directors will soon be finalised.

“The appointment of the new board will be a critical milestone in the institutional recovery of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife as a whole and our anti-rhino poaching efforts as well,” he said.

Pillay said rhino poaching continues to be treated as a priority crime and has the support of the highest level of the SAPS, including the Provincial Commissioner Lieutenant-General Nhlanhla Mkhwanazi.

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