



- [MERCURY](#)
- [NEWS](#)

Rhino poaching report recommended stronger intelligence capacity

A rhino is seen after it was dehorned in an effort to deter the poaching of one of the world's endangered species, at a farm outside Klerksdorp, in the north west province, South Africa. File Picture: REUTERS/Siphiwe Sibeko/Files

Published 10h ago

SHARE

DURBAN - WITH the number of rhinos killed for their horns in KwaZulu-Natal Ezemvelo Wildlife reserves this year set to surpass poaching deaths for the past two years, a report has been released on what should be done to protect the endangered species.

The report was compiled six years ago by a task team that investigated the scourge of rhino poaching and recommended that Ezemvelo beef up its intelligence capacity to combat the crime.

Story continues below Advertisement

It said such an investigation unit could help police and prosecutors secure convictions against those implicated in poaching.

The 54-page document was the first part of the report released by the organisation to the DA after the party demanded that it be made public.

It tackles many deficiencies that allow for poaching, including investigation units that do not do any actual investigations into poaching incidents, and chronic staff shortages.

More on this

- [Key to the fight against rhino poaching is the 'institutional recovery' of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, says Environmental Affairs MEC](#)

It states that Ezemvelo has been faced with unprecedented levels of poaching of both the critically endangered black and white rhino in the recent past.

Latest statistics for 2022 show that poaching is threatening to cause extensive damage to the rhino population in the province.

Ezemvelo said the latest figure showed that 114 rhinos had already been killed this year.

Story continues below Advertisement

It was reported that in 2017, a record 222 rhinos were poached in KZN, this rate dropped to 93 in 2020 and then 102 in 2021.

DA spokesperson on environmental affairs Heinz De Boer said although the recommendations were made six years ago, they were still valid.

He said that the report had many good recommendations, but more money was needed to implement the measures.

Story continues below Advertisement

The report warned of the perils of poaching for the rhino population in the province.

“Rhino poaching, at its present level, could destroy the heritage which the organisation is famous for and the very species the organisation saved would again be under threat of extinction,” it said.

It said poachers could earn millions of rand for their activities, which was “very tempting” for any illegal operator.

Story continues below Advertisement

“Poaching syndicates thrive in situations where the criminal justice system is compromised or not functioning optimally, where wildlife management is weak and disorganised and where levels of corruption are high,” it said.

“We are advised that Ezemvelo has its own internal Wildlife Crime Investigation Team, however, the rangers that we interviewed reported that they had no interaction with this team and as such could not express any opinion or sense of confidence in them.

“This lack of co-ordination appeared to be a major gap in the anti-poaching efforts,” said the report.

“It would appear that although these members are supposed to be an investigation team, no evidence was presented to us that they were involved in actual investigations. It would appear they fulfil more of an intelligence role,” it said.

The report recommended that in response to the surge in poaching, anti-poaching structures must be continually assessed and appraised for effectiveness.

“It is necessary for Ezemvelo to expand its own investigative and intelligence capacity into all aspects of rhino poaching so that it is in the position to support the police and the prosecutors.

“As rhino poachers operate on an organised national level, it is necessary for anti-poaching activities to also be organised at a national level to adequately meet the threat.”

Ezemvelo spokesperson Musa Mntambo said he was aware of the report but directed further questions to the premier’s office saying they had commissioned the investigation.

De Boer said the budget of Ezemvelo should be increased and ring-fenced for anti-poaching measures.

“There were a host of people that were trained (in anti-poaching) and they have not been employed. All the recommendations are dependent on funding, at a minimum, they need an additional R200 million.” He said security experts and a quick reaction force should be deployed to the parks permanently.

Provincial government spokesperson Lennox Mabaso said the report had been used to make some breakthroughs and arrests, but the Office of the Premier had sought to tread carefully to ensure that information did not end up in the hands of poachers.

“The Office of the Premier handed the report to the Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs,” he said.

“The MEC has issued a full statement on the implementation. The crime of rhino poaching is heinous and premature release of reports as sensitive as this one may have unintended consequences that will only serve to alert the criminal networks and compromise future prosecutions.”