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## **Rhino dehorning debate intensifies as poaching continues in Hluhluwe-iMfolozi Game Reserve**



*Dehorned rhinos in Kruger National Park. Picture: Armand Hough / African News Agency (ANA)*

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## **Rhino Dehorning Debate Intensifies as Poaching Continues in Hluhluwe/iMfolozi Game Reserve**

In the midst of an escalating rhino poaching crisis at the Hluhluwe/iMfolozi (HiP) game reserve in KwaZulu-Natal, a contentious debate has arisen over whether dehorning rhinos is an effective strategy to protect them.

While some argue that dehorning could deter poachers, others express concerns about its effectiveness and potential consequences.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, responsible for overseeing the park, has voiced reluctance regarding the dehorning approach. According to Musa Mntambo, a spokesperson for Ezemvelo: "Ongoing discussions have revealed evidence that dehorning in certain protected areas did not prevent poaching, and in one instance, poachers even killed a dehorned rhino."

South Africa's Forestry, Fisheries, and Environment Minister, Barbara Creecy, recently revealed that of the 231 rhinos killed in the country during the first half of the year, 143 were in KwaZulu-Natal.

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Creecy acknowledged that poachers continued to target HiP, where various anti-poaching measures were in place, including the establishment of a Tactical Operations Joint Control Centre and a substantial financial injection for repairing the game reserve's boundary fence.

Dehorning a rhino is a costly procedure, estimated at around R10,000 per rhino. It involves safely immobilising the rhino and removing its horn without causing harm. The effectiveness of dehorning is a subject of debate, with some anecdotal evidence suggesting that dehorned rhinos are two to five times less likely to be poached.

However, there are concerns about potential biological consequences, such as reduced home range for black rhinos and increased vulnerability of calves to poaching.

Jacques O'Dell, a specialist wildlife veterinarian and researcher at the University of Pretoria, is conducting a study to assess the effectiveness of dehorning, its costs, side effects, and cutting techniques.

O'Dell, speaking to the media, highlighted the need for scientific data to inform the decision on whether to dehorn rhinos, emphasising the potential benefits of reduced poaching outweigh the drawbacks.

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However, implementing a dehorning program at HiP would pose logistical challenges due to its size, likely requiring helicopters and planes for efficient execution.

Mntambo of Ezemvelo suggested that other measures, such as improving the boundary fence and increasing foot patrols, might be more effective against poaching.

**IOL Environment**