

**Publication:** The Hilton - Main**Title:** Why hoard horns? Ezemvelo has stockpiled rhino horns since 1972**Publish date:** 01 Apr 2024**Page:** 2**Reach:** 4960**AVE:** R 14007.00**Author:** CHRIS NDALISO

Why hoard horns? Ezemvelo has stockpiled rhino horns since 1972



PHOTO SUPPLIED

■ Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife rangers dehorn a rhino in an attempt to prevent poaching.

CHRIS NDALISO

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife has been keeping a stockpile of rhino horns since 1972.

The entity is currently undergoing a dehorning programme to try and save the endangered species from poachers, but it was mum about the number of animals already dehorned and how many to go.

While African countries like Kenya are reportedly incinerating their stockpiles of elephant tusks, Ezemvelo spokesperson Musa Mntambo said they have been safeguarding their stock.

Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA), an NPO representing the interests of wildlife ranchers, questioned the logic behind storing rhino horn, as doing so increases the risk of theft and sales back into the illicit market.

Mntambo said after the recent dehorning exercise, the horns were kept at the particular reserve overnight and transported to a safe storage facility the next day.

"When rhinos die of natural causes or other causes, the horns have been stocked at the storage facility since 1972.

"Rhino horns, elephant tusks, and lion teeth are kept at the facility. We can't make public the amount of horns in the stockpile, but it is huge, and we can't tell the public the number of rhinos we have in our facilities," said Mntambo.

Asked why the horns were kept and not incinerated, Mntambo said South Africa has different laws in nature conservation.

"There might be a law that speaks to that, hence we have been stockpiling over the years.

"Our country operates differently and maybe in years to come, you might find that wealthy people get allowed to buy these animal derivatives to decorate their homes," said Mntambo.

WRSA spokesperson Miquette Caalsen said there was a high incidence of corruption in national parks where law enforcement officers were involved in graft and up to an estimated 70% were directly or indirectly involved in poaching activities.

"As can be seen from the corruption statistics in one park, these stockpiles merely create an incentive for institutional corruption as these stockpiles' audits are either non-existent or never released for

public accountability.

"The insatiable demand for rhino horn, and other wild animal derivatives in the mainly Eastern Bloc countries, fuels a well-organised, well-connected, well-armed and very well-resourced poaching militia with no scruples," said Caalsen.

A rhino is iconic precisely because of its iconic presence in the natural world — which includes their distinctive horns

"Stockpiling animal derivatives that are in high demand on the market only pressures the black-market militias to become more daring and to spread out to wider areas where similar security resources are not as readily available.

"Thus, as can be seen from the latest poaching statistics, it is simply moving the problem and not in any way solving it," she said.

Last week Ezemvelo revealed that despite concerted efforts, the province lost 325 rhinos in 2023, with a significant 307 of those poached within Hluhluwe-Imfolozi Park.

Chief executive Sihle Mkhize said rhino dehorning, a costly exercise, went against the grain of what the entity stood for, but the persistent threat posed by poachers necessitated more drastic measures to protect the animals.

While dehorning is costly and requires repeated efforts every 18 to 24 months, we are grateful for the financial support from the WWF (World Wildlife Fund)

"Multi-stakeholder collaboration is vital for conservation success," said Mkhize in a statement.

WWF South Africa's chief executive Dr Morné du Plessis said: "A decision to dehorn is never taken lightly and only one of a wide range of interventions which together seek to simultaneously remove the potential reward of rhino poaching while increasing the likelihood of being caught.

"The KZN province has played a critical role in rhino conservation in Africa, that's why we are committing resources towards supporting the authorities in their efforts to protect rhinos."

Apart from increased patrols and fencing upgrades, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife has also introduced integrity testing which includes polygraph testing to root out corruption associated with rhino poaching.