

■ SUFFERING

Ezemvelo head in firing line

Paying R226 000 a month, out of cash-strapped entity's coffers for six private bodyguards after 'serious' threats

MERVYN NAIDOO

THE life of the acting head of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife is apparently under threat. And so afraid is Ntsikelelo Dzulane that he has surrounded himself with six private bodyguards – at a cost of more than R200 000 a month – for which the embattled conservation entity is paying.

The threats are believed to have emerged after Dzulane cancelled a R22 million contract recently.

Nathi Olifant, spokesperson for KwaZulu-Natal's Department of Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental Affairs (Edtea), said the threats Dzulane is facing were "serious".

"Previous chief executives, with exception of Dr David Mabunda, did not have bodyguards. Mabunda had three bodyguards at a cost of R56 940."

While Olifant was reluctant to divulge Dzulane's exact security detail, he confirmed that it would cost Ezemvelo – a government entity and regarded as a crown jewel, especially in the province's tourism sector – around R226 000 to provide Dzulane with protection.

Regarding the service contract that was initiated in January 2018 but was recently terminated, Olifant revealed that, by Wednesday, nearly R17.5m was paid out on the contract which was due to expire in December 2023.

"The termination was not abrupt as proper channels were followed in doing so. Before termination, there were several engagements between Ezemvelo and the service provider over poor service delivery," said Olifant.

Dzulane was also in the firing line when he appeared at the KZN legislature before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts (Scopa) last week, on behalf of Ezemvelo.

He was grilled about the entity's failure to appropriately address fundamental flaws and irregular expenditure that was detected yet again in the books by Auditor-General Kimi Makwetu.

The game of musical chairs played over Ezemvelo's acting chief executive position was also thrown into the mix by Maggie Govender, Scopa's local



NTSIKELELO Dzulane

chairperson. She raised that the lack of stability in the chief executive's position was a big factor in Ezemvelo's failings.

Govender questioned why other senior management positions, like a marketing manager, security manager, and head of supply chain management (SCM), were yet to be appointed.

Ezemvelo, which according to its audited financial statements for the 2017/18 term, had received revenue of nearly R1.1 billion, but has not had an SCM head since 2017.

Insiders said the department was run largely by "interns".

Among the questions put to Dzulane by Scopa was whether Ezemvelo had an "audit management plan" and a plan to manage "risks" found in its structures.

The entity's 2017/18 audit report indicated that 647 992 people visited Ezemvelo's parks, and eco-tourism generated a R241m revenue stream.

Scopa also wanted to know from Dzulane about the entity's failings in the upkeep of its facilities which would result in tourists taking their business to other establishments, and why Ezemvelo's attempts to set up a Section 21

company with community members from the Drakensberg area failed when such a function ought to have been handled by the Edtea.

Olifant said Ezemvelo had set up a "community levy fund" which was a beneficiation initiative where R1 was collected from day visitors and R5 from overnight guests to their facilities. This fund was created to satisfy communities living next to parks, but not seeing any monetary benefits.

The community adjacent to the Didima Resort (Emhlwazini, Drakensberg) complained that they were not enjoying benefits from the resort.

To manage the beneficiation proceeds to the community, Ezemvelo and other role players agreed to create the Section 21 company, said Olifant.

He confirmed that Ezemvelo's SCM manager resigned in August 2017, and due to the moratorium from national government on filling vacant posts, the position could not be advertised.

Ezemvelo considered other options, but it had proved too costly, and then resorted to appointing its fixed assets manager as a temporary SCM head.

This department presently has a staff complement of 11 instead of 16, according to their organogram.

Olifant said, included in its youth educational programmes, was its initiative to give recent graduates work-based experience over a year but at "no stage did interns work on their own or without proper supervision".

Olifant said Ezemvelo had a vibrant internal audit function that reported administratively to the audit and risk committee and to Dzulane.

Audit logs, containing audit findings, were also submitted quarterly to Edtea and feedback was given to Ezemvelo regarding findings.

The process to recruit a chief executive began last year and interviews were scheduled for this month.

He said the delays in the appointment of a marketing manager were due to the possibility that Ezemvelo would be merging with the Sharks Board, which did not happen. However, an appointment would be made in May.



A MANAWA Game Reserve elephant amid thick bush at the KZN reserve. | GRANT FOWLDS

■ CONSERVATION

Charity trumpets elephants' safety

FRED KOCKOTT

THE Aspinall Foundation – an internationally renowned animal conservation charity – has stepped in to save a herd of 32 elephants in a northern KwaZulu-Natal reserve.

This follows the going of conservationist Beyers Coetzee by two bulls outside the privately-owned Manawa Game Reserve on February 18.

Coetzee was killed while his team was trying to drive back the Manawa herd after they had again broken out of the poorly fenced reserve. They were trying to guide the elephants to a safe area away from local villages.

Coetzee was the driving force behind plans to expand the reserve into a larger game park, the Loziba Wilderness, in partnership with neighbouring communities and other landowners.

But recent breakouts by elephants have threatened relations with neighbouring communities, ultimately also jeopardising plans to expand the reserve.

"Now, the entire Manawa herd is at risk of being culled if measures to prevent further human-elephant conflict fail," said Grant Fowlds, an ambassador

of Project Rhino who worked closely with Coetzee, his family and others to realise the vision behind the Loziba Wilderness. "The irony is, Beyers sacrificed his life to save this elephant herd."

Fowlds said to ensure the long-term survival of the herd, a new fence needed to be built around the entire 40000 hectare wilderness, as per a compliance letter issued by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

This alone requires at least R1 million, said Fowlds, who has welcomed the intervention of the foundation.

On Friday, the foundation – a world leader in the breeding and protection of endangered animals – set up a fundraising drive in support of these efforts and the expansion of the game park.

"Beyers committed his life to establishing the area to be known as Loziba Wilderness Reserve, a 40000ha breath-taking piece of land," reads the foundation's plea on the fundraising site Just Giving.

"The loss of Beyers has left his elephants exposed and it is critical that fellow conservationists, who were assisting Beyers with saving the elephants, step in to keep his legacy alive."

The reserve has the potential to safely

house a large number of black and white rhinos, and a host of other threatened species such as lions and cheetahs.

So it was critical that this ecosystem be preserved as it is possibly one of the last remaining wilderness areas in South Africa which remains unprotected, said the foundation.

In the face of booming populations in South Africa, the government lifted a moratorium on elephant culling in 2008 but imposed stringent conditions.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife spokesperson Musa Mntambo confirmed that a lawyer acting on behalf of the Coetzee family, Peter Rutsch, had submitted an appeal not to cull the Manawa herd, but said it was premature to speculate on any decision.

He said the circumstances surrounding the incident would first be thoroughly investigated.

"We are in the business of conserving animals and the decision to destroy any animal is taken with a heavy heart, in most cases only to prevent further loss of human life," said Mntambo.

Coetzee is survived by his wife Una and two young children. | www.rovingreporters.co.za

MR SIHLE ZIKALALA
PREMIER OF KWAZULU-NATAL

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KwaZulu-Natal Premier Mr Sihle Zikalala will deliver his State of the Province address at the sitting of the legislature Premier Zikalala will use the opportunity to report back to the people of KwaZulu-Natal on progress made in the implementation of plans to grow KwaZulu-Natal together.

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