



MEDIA STATEMENT

Date: Monday, 06 June 2022

Attention: Journalists, News Editors and Executive Producers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MKHATSHWA ENGAGES STAKEHOLDERS DURING A ROADSHOW AT THE SONGIMVELO NATURE RESERVE

Elukwatini – Mpumalanga MEC for Finance, Economic Development and Tourism, Mr. Prince Vusumuzi Mkhatshwa, says he is pre-occupied in seeing communities living next to nature reserves, deriving value and economic benefits from the opportunities presented by those nature reserves. MEC Mkhatshwa said this during the stakeholder engagement roadshow with communities surrounding the Songimvelo Nature Reserve, just outside Elukwatini in the Chief Albert Luthuli Local Municipality today (Monday, 06 June 2022).

“Our pre-occupation is to see communities living next to our nature reserves co-existing in harmony, and be the last line of defense of their nature reserves against any waywardness; [furthermore], they must derive value and economic benefits as a result of the opportunities presented by these nature reserves”, explained Mr. Mkhatshwa.

The roadshow follows the MEC’s visit to the area in March this year, where the communities surrounding the Songimvelo Nature Reserve, raised concerns especially about the nature reserve’s dilapidated and porous fence, which allowed animals, particularly elephants, to cross over to communities and started being nuisance by destroying people’s crops, killing their animals, and even endangering their lives.

“By engaging communities residing next to our provincial nature reserves, we confirm our commitment in strengthening relations with our stakeholders; hence our Roadshow to Songimvelo today. We value our stakeholders and as such, we will not leave anyone behind.

“We know about the issue of the dilapidated fence; that is why we have put aside an amount of R15 million to replace it. Through our Entity, the MTPA, we will within seven (7) days advertise a tender to replace the fence in question. We hope that the appointment of the service provider, in this regard, would have been concluded by the end of this month”, added MEC Mkhatshwa.

The MEC also apologised for the delay in replacing the fence, following the suspension of the advertising of tenders by the National Treasury, which has since been uplifted after seeking clarity from the Constitutional Court.

“In the meantime, we have dispatched our rangers to guard the porous fence, to ensure that the animals within the reserve do not cross over to the surrounding communities. Your safety and the protection of your backyard gardens remain our utmost concern”, explained MEC Mkhatshwa.

Community members also raised various service delivery concerns with the MEC, including the delay in land restitution by the national Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development. MEC Mkhatshwa further vowed to engage the department in question, to resolve the matter urgently, and even promised to bring the Department along to come and account to the community, in this regard.

During the Roadshow, 50 families from the surrounding areas were handed food parcels by MEC Mkhatshwa.

"We just thought we should extend a helping hand by providing food parcels to those in need, more especially that the crops in their back gardens were destroyed by the roaming elephants", concluded the MEC.

Onsite services, such as applications for small business funding, were provided by various government development finance institutions. The Roadshow was the first of the many visits and stakeholder engagements that MEC Mkhatshwa will undertake, to all Provincial Nature Reserves, managed by the MTPA (Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency). The purpose of the Roadshow was to raise awareness and address challenges raised by land claimants, adjacent communities, interested and affected parties surrounding the Songimvelo Nature Reserve.

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Issued jointly by the Department of Economic Development and Tourism (the de dt), and the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA)

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