

Incema harvest cancelled

Mbuso Kunene

HUNDREDS of incema harvesters will have to go without this year as the 2025 season has been cancelled owing to recent heavy rainfall.

This annual operation benefits mostly rural communities that depend on the plant to make a living by producing traditional handicraft products like baskets, sleeping mats and traditional beer strainers.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, in collaboration with the iSimangaliso Wetland Park authority, said this difficult decision was made following the recent heavy rains that severely affected the St Lucia area and its surroundings.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife communications manager Musa Mntambo said, "We regret to inform the public that the previously announced incema harvesting operations, scheduled to take place from 5 to 20 May, have been cancelled."

He mentioned that the prolonged downpours resulted in significant waterlogging, rendering large portions of the harvesting areas inaccessible.

"Despite the possibility of the rains subsiding, most of the incema plants remain submerged, making harvesting unsafe and unfeasible at this time.

"As a result, incema harvesting operations have been officially postponed to the 2026 harvesting season. Dates for the 2026 season will be communicated in due course," said Mntambo.

Expressing her regret regarding the news, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife executive manager for biodiversity conservation, Vuyi Radebe, said the safety of harvesters was paramount.

"We acknowledge the importance of incema harvesting for cultural, economic and social purposes, and we share in the disappointment of the affected communities. However, the safety of harvesters and the sustainability of natural resources remain our top priorities.

"We thank all stakeholders, including the St Lucia and Western Shores incema harvesting committees, for their ongoing support, co-operation and commitment," said Radebe.