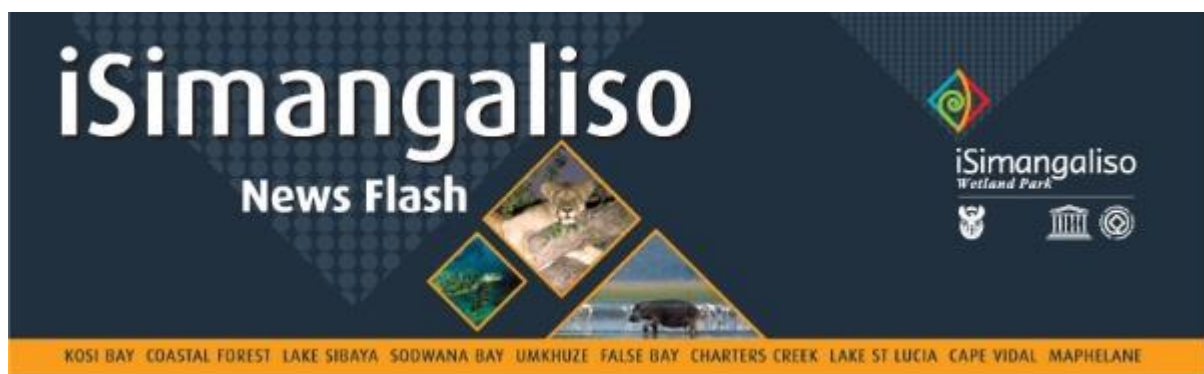




20 August 2026

Media Statement

iSIMANGALISO'S REACTION TO OZABENI LAND INVADERS ARREST

The iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority welcomes the implementation of the interim Court Order yesterday (19 August 2026) at Ozabeni section of the Park. The court order was implemented by the joint operation of the South African Police Services, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and other law enforcement agencies who successfully arrested more than 50 land invaders found trespassing in the protected area of Ozabeni section of the Park, contravening the conditions issued by the High Court of South Africa by Honourable Judge Mlaba on the 30th of June 2026.

iSimangaliso Wetland Park reaffirms its commitment to protecting the integrity of the Park and its status as a protected area and UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Park's position is clear: **illegal occupation, trespassing and damage to Park infrastructure cannot be condoned and will not be tolerated.**



The cutting of the fence, illegal land invasion, agricultural activities, and other illegal activities prompted iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority to approach leaders from the affected areas with an intention of working together to resolve this problem. Sadly, there has been poor cooperation and the destruction continues, as the result iSimangaliso was forced to approach the High Court for urgent relief. To date the damage is estimated to be in excess of 10 hectares of trees cut and land cleared as well as 45 kilometres of park fence vandalised and stolen (this may change as the damage continues). Measures to reduce human–wildlife conflict arising from damaged porous boundary fence line needs to be undertaken soon.



The financial consequences of this matter are substantial. The fencing repairs across the Park associated with illegal fence destruction, cost more than R26 million and the stolen fence costs approximately R20 million. These costs represent pressure on state resources that would otherwise support conservation operations, infrastructure maintenance, community-benefit initiatives and employment-related programmes.

The ongoing insecurity also places implementation of programmes at risk. Twenty-seven contractors appointed for the EPWP LandCare programme in the Ozabeni area are unable to work on site because of the prevailing situation. This interrupt planned work and threatens associated livelihood opportunities, such as contracting and employment programmes across iSimangaliso, including Mbila-based service providers for Cleaning and Greening, Coast care and Road maintenance.



iSimangaliso wishes to send a warning to the public and especially the local communities not to participate in the illegal activities such as land invasion and damaging of the infrastructure, as such actions may lead to further arrest. Barricading of roads and disrupting vehicles on the roads in the Park is equally strongly condemned.

It is critical to note that protecting the Park's ecosystems, wildlife and natural resources contribute to tourism, employment, local economic activity and the long-term wellbeing of surrounding communities.

iSimangaliso has a legal and conservation responsibility to protect the Park's land, wildlife, ecosystems and infrastructure. Any alleged unlawful conduct will be dealt with through the appropriate legal processes and relevant authorities.

At the same time, iSimangaliso recognises the importance of maintaining constructive relationships with law-abiding neighbouring communities. The Park has made attempts to engage with relevant community leadership structures, and while some attempts have not resulted in the desired engagement, **iSimangaliso's doors remain open to peaceful and constructive dialogue.**

iSimangaliso encourages communities and other stakeholders with concerns relating to land or other matters to use appropriate and lawful channels to raise those concerns.

The protection of iSimangaliso is a shared responsibility. We remain committed to conservation, community engagement, the rule of law and finding constructive solutions through lawful processes.

-End-

Statement issued by iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority

For Media enquires:

Mr. Bheki Manzini

Call/WhatsApp: 060 533 2082

Email: bhekimanzini@isimangaliso.com