



iSimangaliso
Wetland Park



**ADDRESS BY MR SIBUSISO BUKHOSINI THE CEO OF ISIMANGALISO WETLAND PARK
AUTHORITY DURING THE HANDOVER OF THE ECO-TOURISM FUNCTION FROM EZEMVELO TO
ISIMANGALISO, IN DURBAN, 05 MARCH 2026.**

- Programme Director
- The CEO of EKZNW,
- Ezemvelo Management,
- iSimangaliso Management,
- Members of the Media,
- Ladies and gentlemen attending this media briefing online and social media, and members of our community,

Good morning

Thank you for joining us today.

As we gather on this historic day that marks the transition of eco-tourism facilities from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife to the iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority, it is important that we address this matter openly and transparently. This transfer marks a significant moment of another new step in the evolution of tourism and conservation management within our World Heritage Site. Change sometimes comes with confusion, and today we aim to provide clarity, reassurance, and a sense of direction.

Allow me to give you a brief overview of the history of iSimangaliso Wetland Park and its interconnectedness with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

iSimangaliso Wetland Park is a consolidation of 16 parcels of land formerly managed by the then Natal Parks Board and former KwaZulu Bureau of Natural resources, later amalgamated as KwaZulu KZN NCS, affectionately known as Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife. In the early 1990s, the land parcels were consolidated into one park called the Greater St Lucia Wetland Park, which was inscribed in 1999 as the first World Heritage Site in South Africa by UNESCO and later called iSimangaliso Wetland Park in accordance with the World Heritage Convention Act 49 of 1999 and its regulations. The World Heritage Site stretches from Kosi Bay near the Mozambique border to Maphelane and St Lucia.

The KwaZulu-Natal Nature Conservation Management Act (Act 9 of 1997) assigns the responsibility of conservation to Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and commercial rights related with the operation of all tourism facilities to iSimangaliso Wetland Park. This subsequently led the establish of an institutional arrangement between the two organisations (Ezemvelo and iSimangaliso) to operationalise and institutionalise the World Heritage Convention through the signing of the Management Agreement in 2001 and later culminating to a Service Level agreement in 2009, allowing Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, at the time, to operate commercial facilities in the Park. In 2025, the two organisations agreed that Ezemvelo will continue to manage conservation within the Park, in accordance with the signed Management Agreement and the regulations. They further agreed to mutually terminate the service level agreement of 2009, hence the takeover we are talking about today. This meant that Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife would officially cease to operate the commercialisation

facilities within iSimangaliso Wetland Park under the auspices of the service level agreement of 2009 and restore the right to operate back to iSimangaliso as per the provision of the World Heritage Convention Regulation Act 49 of 1999 and the Regulation 18(1) of GNR 1193 of 24 November 2000 which required the two entities to conclude a Management Agreement defining their roles and responsibilities.

To ensure that we mitigate business continuity and confusion, the two entities established a Transition Committee which developed a transition plan. iSimangaliso Wetland Park, has adopted a commercialisation strategy wherein, all these facilities will be operated by private investors and to date, as part of the transition, the facilities have been advertised or operational for a shorter period which will later be advertised through Public Private Partnership. The intention is to improve visitor experience, enhance revenue, create more employment and business opportunities for communities living in and adjacent to the park and beyond.

As the long-term Public Private Partnership process is still under way, we assessed several interim options. After evaluating feasibility, risks, and compliance requirements, the short-term lease management model emerged as the most practical and least disruptive option. This interim operating model that will run for a shorter period, and all facilities remain public assets. The appointed operator will oversee day-to-day activities while iSimangaliso maintains full strategic oversight.

Resort tender processes are underway across the iSimangaliso Wetland Park in,

- **Charters Creek Resort:**
- **Kosi Bay Resort:**
- **Mantuma Resort:**
- **Manzengwenya Resort:**
- **Cape Vidal Resort:**
- **Sodwana Bay & Facilities Management:**

Colleagues, as you are aware, following the recent budget speech by the President of South Africa, our sector has experienced significant budget cuts. These reductions have placed iSimangaliso Wetland Park under considerable fiscal pressure-pressures that, in truth, have been building over several years.

To combat such challenges, iSimangaliso Wetland Park Authority is taking bold steps to strengthen our sustainability and reduce reliance on external funding. To achieve this, we have developed a focused Commercialisation Strategy aimed at transforming how we operate while ensuring the long-term protection of this World Heritage Site. This strategy is designed to increase park-generated revenue, reduce losses, and unlock the full value of our tourism assets. It will help us upgrade ageing infrastructure, expand tourism offerings, and importantly, create jobs and meaningful economic opportunities for communities living around the Park.

Our approach includes the commercialisation of both existing and new ecotourism sites. All developments will strictly follow the guidelines of our Integrated Management Plan to ensure that conservation remains at the heart of everything we do. To implement this strategy, we are using a Public-Private Partnership process. This will enable us to restore and modernise ecotourism facilities, attract new investment, and enhance the overall visitor experience.

In short, this commercialisation strategy is about creating a stronger, more inclusive, and more resilient iSimangaliso, one that benefits local communities, supports job creation, and enhances tourism while preserving the ecological integrity of this globally treasured park.

Many have asked what will happen after 28 February 2026. Bookings will continue to be done by Ezemvelo until such time that we notify the public about a service provider. The facilities will not close while the process of commercialisation is underway. We have reached an arrangement with Ezemvelo that they will support the process until the transition is complete. Nothing will change; bookings will proceed as they have been before, with bookings available from the 16th of March 2026. We also recognise that loyalty programmes, including discounts for local residents, form an important part of community access and visitor value. iSimangaliso is considering its own loyalty card system, one that continues to offer meaningful benefits and remains accessible to those who live around the park.

Finally, I want to emphasise that this exit only impacts the ecotourism function; it does not impact the Ezemvelo conservation mandate, and only the eco-tourism management function is now under iSimangaliso. This paradigm shift will allow Ezemvelo to sharpen its focus on conservation, anti-poaching, and wildlife management within iSimangaliso. At the same time, iSimangaliso will strengthen community partnerships, ensuring that neighbouring communities benefit more directly from tourism and co-management opportunities. Safety, including human-wildlife interactions, is a critical priority, and clear emergency and response protocols will be implemented.

We honour the foundational work of Ezemvelo and embrace the future of iSimangaliso as South Africa's first World Heritage Site, dedicated to conservation, community, and discovery.

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