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Contents

No.		Gazette No.	Page No.
GOVERNMENT NOTICES • GOEWERMENTSKENNISGEWINGS			
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Department of / Bosbou, Visserye en die Omgewingsake, Departement van			
7563	National Environmental Management: Waste Act (59/2008): Proposed amendments to the list of waste management activities that have, or are likely to have, a detrimental effect on the environment.....	54761	3

GOVERNMENT NOTICES • GOEWERMENTSKENNISGEWINGS

DEPARTMENT OF FORESTRY, FIDSHERIES AND ENVIRONMENT

NO. 7563 **29 May 2026**

NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT: BIODIVERSITY ACT, 2004 (ACT NO. 10 OF 2004)

THE NATIONAL ELEPHANT HERITAGE STRATEGY

I, Willem Abraham Stephanus Aucamp, Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, hereby publish the National Elephant Heritage Strategy, as set out in the Schedule hereto, for implementation.

The Strategy provides a coherent and evidence-based approach to the conservation and management of *Loxodonta africana* within South Africa, aligned with national biodiversity targets and policy mandates. The Strategy should guide development, revision and implementation of mechanisms and tools, such as the Elephant Norms and Standards, the National Elephant Research Strategy, the Non-Detrimental Finding for Elephants, the Elephant Red-list Assessment, reserve-level Elephant Management Plans, and the National Elephant Meta-Population Plan.

The Strategy serves as the South African National Elephant Action Plan (AEAP) in terms of the country's implementation of the African Elephant Action Plan, aligning with international obligations and providing a basis for engagement with range states as to how the country is meeting the objectives of the AEAP.

Electronic copies of the National Elephant Heritage Strategy can be downloaded from the following link: https://www.dffe.gov.za/legislation/gazetted_notices or www.gpwonline.gov.za

MR WILLEM ABRAHAM STEPHANUS AUCAMP
MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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Biodiversity for Life
South African National Biodiversity Institute

NATIONAL ELEPHANT HERITAGE STRATEGY FOR SOUTH AFRICA

2026 - 2036



This document links to an extensive background document that provides details of the status of South Africa's elephants, as well as the co-development process with National, provincial, and local governments, community organisations, traditional leaders, traditional healers, academic institutions, non-government organisations, wildlife industry, research and wildlife sector. (available on the: https://www.dffe.gov.za/legislation/gazetted_notices OR https://www.gpwonline.co.za/egazettes/)

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TABLE OF CONTENT

1. Executive summary 4
2. Acronyms 10
3. Definitions 10
4. Introduction 11
5. Brief description of the policy and legislative context of the Strategy 12
6. Consultation process 13
7. National vision 17
8. Goals and Strategic Activities 18
8.1. Environmental Goal 18
8.2. Social Goal 20
8.3. Economic Goal 22
8.4. Enabling Governance 24
8.5. Enabling Engagement 26
9. Implementing the Strategy: Reflection and Adaptation 29
ANNEXURE 1: LINKAGES BETWEEN THE NATIONAL ELEPHANT HERITAGE STRATEGY AND THE OUTCOMES OF THE NATIONAL ELEPHANT INDABA. 31
ANNEXURE 2: NATIONAL ELEPHANT INDABA REPORT. 34

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1. Executive summary

African elephants (*Loxodonta africana and L. cyclotis*) have played an important role in human history, culture, religion, and spirituality for centuries. They are valued not only for their ecological role but also for the cultural, spiritual, and economic benefits they bring. At the same time, living alongside elephants can be challenging. They can pose risks to people, livestock, and crops, which can affect the livelihoods and well-being of the communities that share the landscape with them.

Elephants have long been a meaningful part of people's lives—through history, culture, spirituality, and daily experience. Because of this deep, shared relationship between elephants and people, especially in South Africa, it's important to look beyond just the biological aspects of conserving the species. While protecting elephant populations is crucial, it's equally important to recognise the broader heritage they represent.

In South Africa, elephants are woven into the country's traditions, history, and sense of identity. They hold cultural and spiritual significance for many communities and contribute to how people see themselves as South Africans, in all their diversity. This elephant heritage connects people to the land, to each other, and to their past and future generations, and it also influences livelihoods, well-being, and even national politics and the economy.

Therefore, South Africa should not only focus on protecting elephants as a species but also work to strengthen and celebrate the deep connection between elephants and people. This rich heritage deserves to be preserved and supported as an essential part of the country's cultural and spiritual fabric.

The primary threats to elephant survival globally remain habitat loss and illegal killing of individuals for their ivory. However, in South Africa, elephant poaching is minimal, affecting less than 0.01% of the national population annually. In contrast, habitat fragmentation, the small size of many populations, and habitat loss are increasingly important concerns.

By the end of 2024, South Africa was home to about 44,000 African savanna elephants (*Loxodonta africana*), and the population continues to grow. This is a major conservation success, especially when compared to the decline of elephant numbers in some other African countries. Over the past 40 years, elephants in South Africa have also expanded their range. Most elephants in the country live in government-protected areas like Kruger National Park, Mapungubwe National Park, and Tembe Elephant Park. These parks are part of larger Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs), where elephants often move freely across national borders and are shared with neighbouring countries. In addition to these large parks, there are 89 smaller, fenced reserves that also support elephant populations. About 6,000 elephants are owned privately or by communities, and in recent years, more and more communities have started to manage elephants themselves. Elephants are now being seen more frequently roaming freely in provinces such as Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West, and KwaZulu-Natal and there is one free-ranging elephant in the Garden Route National Park.

The National Elephant Heritage Strategy (NEHS) provides guidance for managing all these elephants as a collective national herd. It aims to fulfil the aspirations South Africans have for elephants, including conservation, cultural values, economic opportunities, and responsible use.

In South Africa, elephants are considered nationally as IUCN category Least Concern, despite being considered globally as IUCN category Endangered. The private sector has played an important role in developing and implementing many innovative elephant management approaches and tools that have contributed significantly to this conservation success. *L. africana* is currently listed as a Protected species in terms of section 56(1) of the National

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Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 2004 (Act No. 10 of 2004) (NEM: BA). In addition, South Africa's African elephant population is included in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) Appendix II; however, ivory is deemed to be included in Appendix I, for which international commercial trade is currently prohibited. Because of its value and importance for people and the environment, and its dependence on active conservation management, including protection against poaching, the African elephant warrants special attention as a species. Hence, the development of this NEHS.

South Africa's success in recovering elephant populations offers hope for the species but brings difficult trade-offs in the context of the country's developmental agenda. Currently, the management of individual elephant populations in South Africa is informed by the National Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants in South Africa (Elephant Norms and Standards), which were published for implementation in 2008 (Government Gazette No. No. 30833). These norms require each reserve with elephants to have an approved Elephant Management Plan, aligned with the reserve objectives, which govern how elephants are managed and used on that reserve.

Managing elephants is context-specific and requires an integrated approach that addresses the particular ways in which elephants influence socio-ecological systems at a locality, whether across or within a site. Management therefore needs to consider the full range of available tools, which may also be applied simultaneously. These include water and fire management, fencing, translocation, contraception, and, in some cases, culling.

These activities are framed by the Elephant Norms and Standards. The Norms and Standards set out a progression of management actions in Annexure VI, beginning with non-lethal approaches such as translocation, contraception, range expansion, and range manipulation, and moving toward more interventionist or lethal options, such as culling, only when earlier steps are not feasible.

While the current Elephant Norms and Standards provide important guidance on available management approaches, they do not yet fully present the complete suite of management opportunities in an integrated manner that systematically addresses the diverse socio-ecological conditions that differ from place to place. In practice, effective elephant management often requires combinations of tools applied in ways that reflect local ecological processes, landscape characteristics, and social contexts. A more integrated framing could therefore assist managers in considering how different interventions may work together to respond to the specific circumstances of each site in a rational and context-appropriate way.

Furthermore, the Elephant Norms and Standards, together with associated reserve management plans, primarily focus on site-level management. They do not address broader strategic policy considerations, such as the management of elephants in South Africa as a national meta-population, ensuring that all South Africans benefit from the full range of values that elephants provide, and promoting equitable, sustainable, and inclusive access to the benefits associated with elephants. Developing such a broader strategic perspective could complement the existing guidance and support more coherent and balanced decision-making across the country.

Several processes, including the National Biodiversity Research and Evidence Strategy (NBRES) Indaba, highlighted an urgent need to develop a national approach to, and goals for, elephant conservation and sustainable use. This will have a different purpose to the existing Norms and Standards which regulate management, reserve elephant management plans that govern management of elephants on reserves, the National Elephant Meta-population plan (under development, and which facilitates best-practice management across reserves), and the 2014 Elephant Research Strategy, all of which may require review to align better with the NEHS. A national heritage approach should be focused on the conservation of the national elephant herd, and the various benefits, services and values which

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should equitably flow from it to all South Africans, for current and future generations. Our newly developed NEHS provides the framework to achieve this.

This NEHS includes key elements typically found in conservation strategies, such as those outlined in a National Elephant Action Plan (NEAP), as guided by the African Elephant Action Plan agreed by all range states under CITES. As such, the NEHS serves as South Africa's NEAP. A National Heritage Strategy, however, goes further by focusing on South African societal aspirations, emphasising the promotion of a sustainable intergenerational legacy for all South Africans. In addition, the strategy is structured to give effect to the White Paper on Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity, the Policy Position on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Elephant, Lion, Leopard and Rhinoceros, and the draft National Biodiversity Economy Strategy, with specific reference to the African savanna elephant.

Consistent with the principles of the Kunming-Montreal 2022 Global Biodiversity Framework, the strategy took a whole-of-society approach in its development. Phase 1 included focus group consultation for the development of the vision and goals based on the values that participants expressed regarding elephants. Phase 2 included further focus group engagements to provide feedback and refine the vision and goals, and to develop the activities. Phase 3 provided the formal public participation process, which included further focus group engagements and the opportunity for interested and affected parties to submit written comments. Over 700 people participated in our focus group consultative engagements. These delegates represent a broad spectrum of the key stakeholder groups, including NGOs and Associations with large memberships, representatives of large communities living with elephants (National People and Parks, and delegates at site-based community engagement workshops), Traditional Health Practitioners, Traditional Leaders, elephant owners and managers, elephant specialists and academics, representatives from the private sector, and spheres of national, provincial, and local government concerned with elephants. During Phase 3 public participation, we received 25 written submissions from a wide range of stakeholders as reflected in the participants in Phases 1 and 2 above. Six community consultations included 614 participants representing a wide range of communities as above. In addition, 0n 12 and 13 August 2025, a National Elephant Indaba was led by the Deputy Minister of the DFFE, Mr Narend Singh at Bonamanzi Game Reserve, northern KwaZulu-Natal. The aim of the National Elephant Indaba was to bring together key stakeholders to discuss the complexities around human-elephant conflict and to shape a national, unified response rooted in science, lived-experience, and constitutional principles of environmental justice. The Indaba was attended by approximately 180 participants in-person and online with representatives of a wide range of stakeholders including community representatives, traditional leaders and traditional health practitioners, government departments and entities, industry organizations, and NGO's.

Stakeholders provided input on values and aspirations they associate with South Africa's elephants. By weighing the values expressed by stakeholders, according to their level of stake in elephants and the species' impact on their lives and/or livelihood, a collective South African aspiration was distilled, as now captured in the strategy's vision.

The **Vision** of the National Elephant Heritage Strategy of South Africa is:

Resilient elephant populations help nature thrive, support cultural and spiritual traditions, and give South Africans fair and inclusive chances to live well now and in the future.

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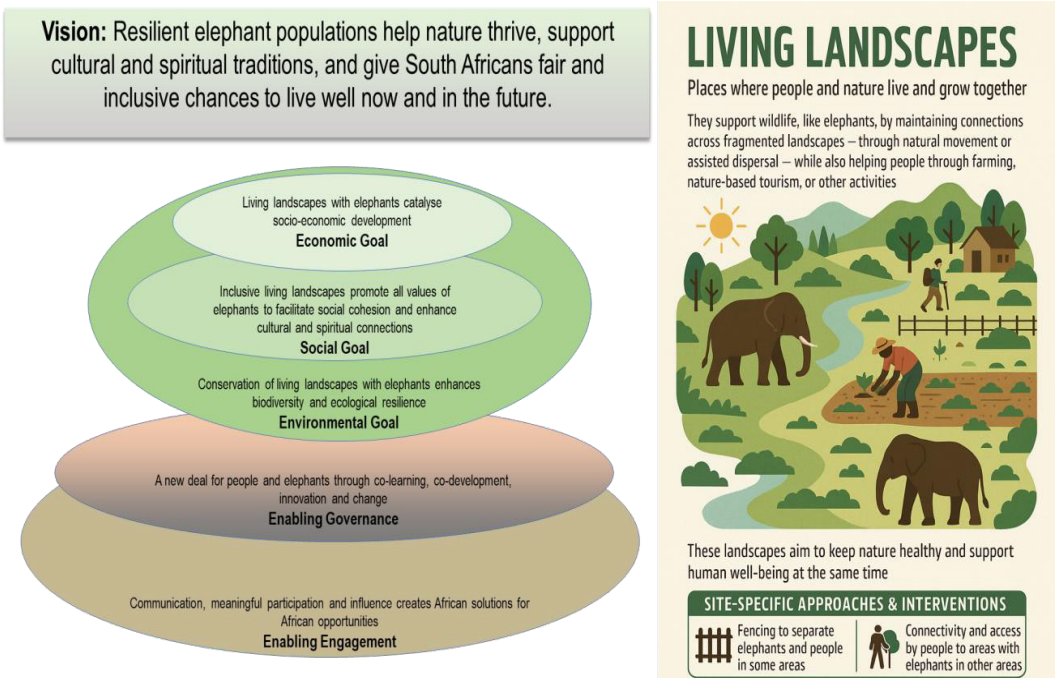


Fig. 1: Diagrammatic summary of South Africa's National Elephant Heritage Strategy.

Living landscapes are places where people and nature live and grow together. They support wildlife, like elephants, by maintaining connections across fragmented landscapes - through natural movement or assisted dispersal - while also supporting people through farming, nature-based tourism, or other activities. These landscapes aim to keep nature healthy and support human well-being at the same time. This is promoted through site-specific approaches and interventions, such as fencing to separate elephants and people in some areas, while ensuring connectivity and access by people to areas with elephants in order areas.

The emergent vision has three core elements: environmental outcomes and the influence that elephants can have on these; social outcomes that embrace all the values of elephants, including their cultural and spiritual importance; and economic outcomes and how elephants can contribute to these. The vision is aspirational, aiming to do better than just achieving sustainability (*i.e.*, the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level, or avoiding depletion), or only resilience (*i.e.*, the ability to recover quickly after a disturbance), rather encompassing restorative and regenerative practices that enhance and build up the world's natural and social capital[1].

The aspiration seeks to ensure that thriving elephants contribute to improving the well-being of people and ecosystems simultaneously. Using whole systems approaches, it is imperative for South Africa to harness collaboration, co-learning and co-working, so that our collective wisdom, capacity and actions bring forth a flourishing world and thriving life. Elephants play a significant role in maintaining a balance where the creation of value exceeds consumption, crucial for sustaining and increasing South Africa's social and natural capital, which are fundamental for inclusive socio-economic development. Hereby, elephants serve as a flagship for driving change toward "Thriving People and Nature".

[1] Russell, J.M., 2013. Thrivability: Breaking through to a world that works. Triarchy Press

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The three key goals of the National Elephant Heritage Strategy are:

Goal 1: Conservation of living landscapes with elephants that enhances biodiversity and ecological resilience.

Goal 2: Inclusive living landscapes promote all values of elephants to facilitate social cohesion and enhance cultural and spiritual connections.

Goal 3: Living landscapes with elephants catalyse inclusive socio-economic development.

However, achieving these goals requires the establishment of good governance and meaningful stakeholder engagement that recognises key trade-offs particular to elephants, given increasing elephant populations. The country must balance ecological impacts in landscapes, reduce human-elephant conflict, and still realise the cultural and economic value of elephants—all while acting with compassion. These trade-offs reflect the complexity of managing elephants in line with the White Paper's vision. Navigating such trade-offs among the diverse aspirations of South Africans will substantially benefit from inclusive, equitable and transparent engagement, ensuring the acknowledgement and inclusion of the values, needs, and aspirations of all stakeholders. Enablers within the strategy provide for facilitating these aspects. The two enablers are:

Enabler 1: Enabling governance - A new deal for people and elephants through co-learning, co-development, innovation, and change.

Enabler 2: Enabling engagement - Communication, meaningful participation, and influence create African solutions for African opportunities.

Stakeholders provided further input through a second round of consultation that helped identify key activities to achieve the goals and enablers that capture specific values expressed by stakeholders, and outcomes which contribute to achieving the Goals of the White Paper: 1) Enhanced Biodiversity Conservation, 2) Sustainable Use, 3) Equitable Access and Benefit Sharing, and 4) Transformation. These strategic activities are captured under each Goal and Enabler.

This strategy contributes to achieving, amongst others, the outcomes of:

1. Thriving people, nature and elephants are considered and realised.
2. Expanded, connected, thriving, state, private, and community-owned land that conserves viable populations of elephants in living landscapes.
3. Financial support and incentives are harnessed and leveraged to ensure the biodiversity sector is adequately resourced and inclusive.
4. Improved livelihoods and well-being of local communities, through meaningful participation, and increased and more inclusive access and fair benefit sharing.
5. The role of elephants in African cultural and spiritual traditions is respected and strengthened, and, where necessary, restituted and restored.
6. Improved governance, co-management and partnerships, and contribution to the biodiversity economy, with meaningful community participation, influence, benefit, and empowerment as equal and influential participants, ensuring an inclusive biodiversity sector.
7. Clear understanding of the intent and aspirations of South Africa, in promoting the conservation and management of elephants and their landscapes for the well-being of people and nature.

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This strategy intends to provide a strategic framework for planning and decision-making around living landscapes with elephants. As such, this strategy guides the development, revision and implementation of strategies, frameworks, mechanisms and tools, such as the Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants in South Africa, the National Elephant Research Strategy, the Non-Detrimental Finding for Elephants, the Elephant Red-list Assessment, reserve-level Elephant Management Plans, the National Elephant Meta-Population Framework, and engagements regarding elephants in relevant consultative fora, *etc.* Even so, the National Elephant Heritage Strategy embraces evidence-based elephant management and seeks to adapt approaches upon reflection and identifying new lessons learned.

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2. Acronyms

AEAP	African Elephant Action Plan
CITES	Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora
DFFE	Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Government of South Africa
HLP	High-Level Panel
NBES	National Biodiversity Economy Strategy
NEAP	National Elephant Action Plan
NEHS	National Elephant Heritage Strategy
NEMA	National Environmental Management Act, 107 of 1998, as amended
NEM: BA	National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act, 10 of 2004, as amended
NEM: PAA	National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act, 57 of 2003, as amended
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organisations
PDIs	Previously Disadvantaged Individuals
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
WP	The White Paper on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity

3. Definitions

Use of terms in this strategy should be understood in terms of the definitions contained within the White Paper, relevant legislation, or the general understanding of such terms. Definitions are not repeated here for the sake of brevity.

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4. Introduction

African savanna elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) are vital to ecosystems across Africa and offer lasting benefits for future generations around the world. In South Africa, elephants live in both large, cross-border populations—shared with countries like Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe—and in many smaller parks and conservation areas across the country. Elephant numbers in South Africa are growing. However, the conditions elephants live in vary widely from one area to another, both within South Africa and compared to other African countries. The private sector has played an important role in helping elephants expand their range and in maintaining well-protected populations.

Many protected areas with elephants are surrounded by land uses that are incompatible with elephants, leading to the installation of fences to restrict elephant movements and prevent human-elephant conflicts. However, elephants are now being seen more frequently roaming freely in parts of Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West, and KwaZulu-Natal, and there is one free-ranging elephant in the Garden Route National Park.

African elephants shape their ecosystems and influence the physical environment, benefiting other species. People value elephants for many reasons, including but not limited to, the benefits provided to tourists, rural communities, and society at large. Elephants, however, can also pose risks to biodiversity, cause damage to property, and come into conflict with people. Balancing the various benefits of elephants and costs of living with them is a complex trade-off challenge to South Africa.

Managing elephants is context-specific and requires an integrated approach that considers the particular ways in which elephants influence socio-ecological systems at a locality. Management therefore needs to consider the full range of available tools, including water and fire management, fencing, translocation, contraception, and, in some cases, culling. These activities are framed by the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA), under which the National Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants (Elephant Norms and Standards) came into effect on 1 May 2008 (Notice No. 30833, Government Gazette, 29 February 2008). The Elephant Norms and Standards set out a progression of management actions in Annexure VI, beginning with non-lethal approaches such as translocation, contraception, range expansion and range manipulation, and moving toward more interventionist options, such as culling, only when earlier steps are not feasible. However, while the Elephant Norms and Standards provide guidance on available interventions, they do not fully integrate the suite of management opportunities needed to address context-specific socio-ecological conditions, nor do they address broader strategic considerations such as managing elephants as a national meta-population and ensuring equitable, sustainable access to the benefits that elephants provide to all South Africans.

The Elephant Norms and Standards provides the legislative environment for the management of elephants, however a shared vision for elephant conservation and sustainable use amongst its citizens is lacking. The African Elephant Action Plan has a continental focus and a traditional conservation approach that guides the aspirations of African elephant range states. South Africa, however, is a nation of diverse cultures, with a historical and ongoing legacy of social injustices. Many of its citizens have no access to the cultural, spiritual and other values of elephants, and have been excluded from decision-making processes concerning elephants.

This strategy aims to guide the integration of the aspirations of all South Africans promoting thriving elephants and their role in enhancing the thrivability of people and nature alike. The strategy recognises elephants as an integral part of South Africa's natural and social heritage, valued for many reasons by diverse cultures. Moreover, living landscapes with elephants enhance broader biodiversity and ecological resilience, and catalyse and stimulate inclusive sustainable development.

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5. Brief description of the policy and legislative context of the Strategy

South Africa's environmental management is underpinned by the environmental right in Section 24 of the Constitution, which is given effect in law through the National Environmental Management Act, 1998 (Act No. 107 of 1998) (NEMA) and its subsidiary legislation (including The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 2004 (Act No. 10 of 2004) (NEM: BA) and the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act, 2003 (Act No. 57 of 2003) (NEM: PAA) and their regulations). Provinces, have concurrent competence, and have their own specific legislation applicable to that province. Legislation from other spheres of Government also plays a role in governing elephant conservation and sustainable use.

The White Paper on the Conservation of the Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity (Government Gazette, No. 48785, and No. 3537 for implementation on 14 June 2023) provides a foundation for conservation and sustainable use in terms of its four goals, namely:

1) Enhanced Biodiversity Conservation (All biological diversity and its components conserved);

2) Sustainable Use (The sustainable use of biodiversity contributes to the thriving of both terrestrial and marine landscapes and ecosystems, local livelihoods, and human well-being, while a duty of care avoids, minimises, or remedies adverse impacts on biodiversity);

3) Equitable Access and Benefit Sharing (Benefits derived and shared from the use and development of South Africa's genetic and biological resources should not compromise the national interests); and

4) Transformed Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use (Effect is given to the environmental right as contained in Section 24 of the Constitution, which facilitates redress and promotes transformation).

As well as two cross-cutting Enablers:

1) Enabler 1: Integrated, Mainstreamed and Effective Biodiversity Conservation and Sustainable Use: Integrated policy and practice across government and the effective implementation of Multilateral Environmental Agreements; and

2) Enabler 2: Enhanced Means of Implementation: Expanded and developed ability to effectively conserve biodiversity, to manage its use and benefit sharing, whilst addressing factors threatening biodiversity.

The White Paper sets out the vision: "*An inclusive, transformed society living in harmony with nature, where biodiversity conservation and sustainable use ensure healthy ecosystems, with improved benefits that are fairly and equitably shared for present and future generations*", with the Mission: "*To conserve and manage South Africa's biodiversity, and ensure healthy ecosystems, ecological integrity and connectivity, with transformative socio-economic benefits to society for current and future generations through ecologically sustainable, and socially equitable use of what people values from nature*". The White Paper impact statement is "*Thriving People and Nature*".

The White Paper explicitly recognises that responsibility rests with a range of stakeholders, including, but not limited to, the state, traditional leaders, traditional health practitioners, communities, private landowners, industry, academia, non-government organisations and civil society. Building partnerships, particularly community–private partnerships, between these constituencies will be important, and this National Elephant Heritage Strategy takes this approach.

The Policy Position on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Elephant, Lion, Leopard, and Rhinoceros (Government Gazette, No. 50541, for implementation on 24 April 2024), focuses primarily on correcting unsustainable practices, promoting conservation, sustainable use, and the well-being of the five species, including elephants, and providing

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policy direction for international commercial trade in the five species. In terms of elephants, the Policy Position, provides two relevant commercial trade-related policy objectives:

1. To promote live export of the five species only to range states or any other appropriate and acceptable destinations with suitable habitats on the African continent; and
2. Consider international commercial elephant ivory trade only when conditions become favourable.

The revised National Biodiversity Economy Strategy (NBES) (Government Gazette, No. 50279, published for public comment on 8 March 2024) was developed to optimise biodiversity-based business potentials across the terrestrial, fresh water, estuarine, and marine and coastal realms, and to contribute to economic growth with local beneficiation, job creation, poverty alleviation, and food security, whilst maintaining the ecological integrity of the biodiversity resource base, for thriving people and nature.

The National Biodiversity Economy Strategy (NBES) focuses on using South Africa's rich natural resources to support both conservation and economic development. It promotes inclusive growth in areas like ecotourism, sustainable wildlife and marine use, and bioprospecting, with an emphasis on benefiting local communities and previously disadvantaged individuals. By strengthening policies, building capacity, encouraging innovation, providing financial support, and improving market access, the strategy aims to create a thriving biodiversity economy that supports both people and nature.

Consistent with the policy context of the White Paper, the NBES is founded on the key pillars of conservation, sustainable use and beneficiation of biodiversity business value chains which will promote sustainable and inclusive socio-economic development. This requires growing and sustaining conservation land and seascapes while promoting and facilitating inclusive biodiversity-based businesses that drive a thriving and inclusive biodiversity sector. Importantly, broadening the NBES in revision provides increased opportunity to contribute to achieving more elements of the National Development Plan and the Sustainable Development Goals. This emphasises the importance of sustainable use of biodiversity as key to inclusive socio-economic development, especially when effectively mainstreamed into cross-sectoral planning.

6. Consultation process

A societal consultation process was followed and focused on several stakeholder engagements to ensure that all relevant stakeholders were included in the process. In order to co-develop the strategy with relevant stakeholders a total of 12 workshops, inclusive of local communities, landowners/managers, scientists/industry/NGOs, and government departments, were conducted between 2019 and 2022 to provide information on values that South Africans have for elephants. Workshops were conducted in areas with key elephant populations (Fig. 2).

Each workshop targeted specific types of stakeholders (*e.g.*, reserve managers, elephant owners, scientists and NGOs, policy developers, local people, environmental management agencies, other government bodies and several stakeholder engagements focused on local communities adjacent or near areas with elephants) (Table 1). At each workshop, stakeholders were asked to list the services, benefits and values associated with elephants, as well as the risks and costs of elephants, and key approaches to ensure elephants' contribution to socio-ecological sustainability. This provided insight into the various perspectives and aspirations of stakeholders in varied settings, encompassing state, private, or communal ownership, reserves of diverse sizes, reserves that traverse cadastral borders, or with multiple owners and management structures, that included people who don't own elephants. The consultation process also included feedback received from relevant stakeholders after the meetings. In line with the White Paper's emphasis

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on the need for transformation and incorporating the voice of communities living with wildlife, the process also considered the High-Level Panel (HLP) Report's community engagements (p553 – 571 of that report).

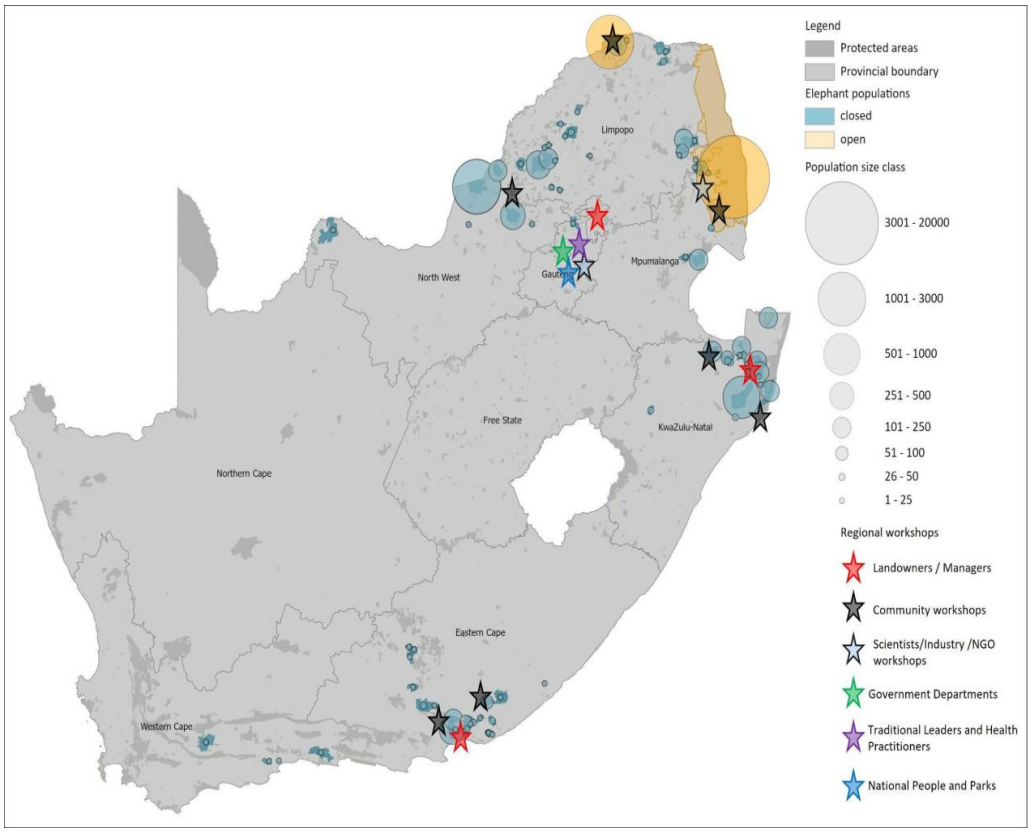


Figure 2: The distribution of stakeholder engagements in relation to the key elephant populations within South Africa, highlighting that stakeholder engagements were conducted in the same areas of the key elephant populations. There were initial consultations to inform the development of the vision and framework of the strategy, with follow-up meetings (virtual for managers, owners, scientists/industry/NGOs) to provide feedback on the vision and goals and gather inputs on potential activities.

In total, 430 people were engaged in the first workshop process. These delegates represent a broad spectrum of the key stakeholder groups, including NGOs and Associations with large memberships, representatives of large communities living with elephants (National People and Parks, and delegates at site-based community engagement workshops), Traditional Health Practitioners, Traditional Leaders, elephant owners and managers, elephant specialists and academics, representatives from the private sector, and spheres of national, provincial, and local government concerned with elephants. The process collated all values expressed by stakeholders during these engagements, as well as those documented in the HLP report, resulting in a list of 45 elements of values. These values were then listed per engagement and aggregated to indicate which were most frequently expressed across stakeholder groups. The values stakeholders expressed were weighted by the level of stake in elephants as well as the impact that elephants have on a stakeholder and/or their livelihood.

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Based on the inputs received from the these stakeholder engagements, the vision, impact statement and key goals were developed. The second phase of consultation took place in 2023. During this phase of consultation, the draft vision, impact statement and goals were presented to the same stakeholders as in phase 1 to obtain buy-in and support for what had been developed. The process then focused on obtaining additional information on key actions to be implemented in order to achieve the specific goals. In total, 335 people were engaged in the second round of stakeholder engagements.

Overall, the majority of stakeholders were in support of the vision and impact statement with minor changes suggested. Based on the inputs received, changes were made to some of the goals and key actions were added to each of the goals.

Table 1: Organisations that were involved in developing and implementing various aspects of the National Elephant Heritage Strategy.

National Governments and their Entities	1. Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (Biodiversity and Conservation; Regulatory Compliance and Enforcement) 2. Department of Agriculture, Land Reform and Rural Development (DALRRD) 3. Department of International Relations and Cooperation 4. Department of Tourism 5. South African National Biodiversity Institute 6. South African National Parks 7. iSimangaliso Wetland Park
Provincial Government and their Entities	1. Eastern Cape Province: Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism 2. Gauteng Province: Department of Agriculture and Rural Development 3. Limpopo Province: Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism 4. North West: Department of Economic Development, Environment, Conservation and Tourism 5. CapeNature 6. Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism Agency 7. Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife 8. Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency 9. North West Parks and Tourism Board
Community Organisations and Programmes	1. People and Parks Forum 2. Traditional Health Practitioners and Healers Organisations 3. Traditional Leaders 4. Community members living adjacent to key elephant populations

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Academic Institutions	1. University of Pretoria 2. University of Oxford 3. University of the Witwatersrand 4. University of Cape Town 5. Nelson Mandela University 6. University of KwaZulu-Natal 7. University of Stellebosch
Non-Government Organisations; Industry; Research & Wildlife Sector	1. African Parks 2. Animal Law Reform 3. BirdLife SA 4. Born Free 5. Confederation of Hunting Associations of South Africa (CHASA) 6. Custodians of Professional Hunting and Conservation South Africa 7. Environmental Investigations Agency 8. Elephant Care Association 9. Elephants Alive 10. EMS Foundation 11. Elephant Specialist Advisory Group 12. Endangered Wildlife Trust 13. Humane World for Animals 14. National Council of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSPCA) 15. Professional Hunters Association of South Africa 16. Elephant Owners and Reserve Managers 17. South African Hunters and Game Conservation Association 18. South African Veterinary Association 19. Wildlife ACT 20. Wildlife Forum 21. Wildlife Ranching South Africa

During Phase 3 public participation, we received 25 written submissions, including five from individuals, and submissions from a wide range of stakeholders as reflected in the participants in Phases 1 and 2 above. Six community consultations included 614 participants representing a wide range of communities as above.

On 12 and 13 August 2025, a National Elephant Indaba was led by the Deputy Minister of the DFFE, Mr Narend Singh at Bonamanzi Game Reserve, northern KwaZulu-Natal. The aim of the National Elephant Indaba was to bring together key stakeholders to discuss the complexities around human-elephant conflict and to shape a national, unified response rooted in science, lived-experience, and constitutional principles of environmental justice. The Indaba had the following key objectives:

- To build an understanding of elephants and management practices across the region.

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- To create appreciation for the interface between elephants and people.
- Strengthen the relationship amongst SADC elephant range states.
- Finding implementable solutions and interventions for people and elephants thriving together.

The Indaba was attended by approximately 180 participants in-person and online with representatives of the following governments and government entities, organizations and institutions. (A full report on the National Elephant Indaba is included as Annexure 2).

- Deputy Minister Singh; Member of the Executive Council (MEC) of North West (Economic Development, Conservation, and Tourism); KZN MEC (COGTA)
- Chairperson of Select Committee; Chairperson of NHTKL
- SANParks, SANBI, and iSimangaliso Wetland Park
- Provincial conservation authorities: EKZNW; MTPA; ECPTA; NWPTB; EKZN; LEDET.
- Local communities, Traditional Leaders, Traditional Health Practitioners, the People and Parks
- Academic institutions
- Wildlife industry associations
- Private Game Reserve managers and owners
- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- Animal welfare organisations
- UNEP
- The Indian High Commission & Botswana government.

Subsequent to the Indaba the key resolutions and outcomes of the Indaba were evaluated against the goals and activities captured in the Strategy. Annexure 1 table 1 highlights the linkages between the Strategy goals and activities with the Indaba outcomes. The alignment between the processes highlight the value of societal co-development processes compared to top-down processes.

7. National vision

Vision

Resilient elephant populations help nature thrive, support cultural and spiritual traditions, and give South Africans fair and inclusive chances to live well now and in the future.

The emergent vision, based on the values most frequently expressed by the stakeholders, has three core elements: the environmental role of elephants, their economic contributions, and the social benefits they bring, including cultural and spiritual importance. The vision is aspirational, aiming beyond just achieving sustainability (i.e., the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level, or avoiding depletion), or only resilience (i.e., the ability to recover quickly after a disturbance), encompassing restorative and regenerative practices that enhance the world's natural and social capital. This reflects a concept of "Thriving People and Nature," which positions thrivability as part of South Africa's just transition from unsustainable practices to a future where all people prosper, and the environment is nurtured to support them, significantly aided by elephants and their habitats.

The aspiration seeks to ensure that elephants contribute to improving the well-being of people and ecosystems simultaneously. Using whole systems approaches, it is imperative for South Africa to evolve its communal relations

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through collaboration, co-learning and co-working, so that citizens' collective wisdom and actions bring forth a flourishing world and thriving life. Elephants play a significant role in maintaining a balance where the creation of value exceeds consumption; crucial for sustaining and increasing South Africa's social and natural capital which are fundamental for inclusive socio-economic development. Hereby, elephants serve as a flagship for driving inclusive change toward "Thriving People and Nature".

8. Goals and Strategic Activities

The aspirations expressed by the stakeholders span three key dimensions – (a) environmental, (b) social and (c) economic (Figure 1). However, achieving these goals requires the establishment of (d) good governance and (e) stakeholder engagement that recognises key trade-offs particular to elephants. Navigating such trade-offs among the diverse aspirations of South Africans will substantially benefit from equitable and transparent engagement, ensuring the acknowledgement and inclusion of the values, needs, and aspirations of all stakeholders.

8.1. Environmental Goal

GOAL 1: *Conservation of living landscapes with elephants that enhances biodiversity and ecological resilience.*

Elephants play a vital role in ecosystems, serving as key drivers and maintaining ecological, cultural, and spiritual resilience in their habitats. In addition, elephants also have an existence value on their own. However, their ecological influence depends on how intensely they use localities, with risks to biodiversity and landscapes in areas of very high use.

Living landscapes are places where people and nature live and grow together. They support wildlife, like elephants, by maintaining connections across fragmented landscapes - through natural movement or assisted dispersal - while also supporting people through farming, nature-based tourism, or other activities. These landscapes aim to keep nature healthy and support human well-being at the same time. This is promoted through site-specific approaches and interventions, such as fencing to separate elephants and people in some areas, while ensuring ecological connectivity, and access by people to areas with elephants in other areas.

Small areas available to elephants require more management. Elephants require large spaces to thrive, and in fragmented landscapes, they require connectivity to move between suitable habitats. When connections are constrained, interventions such as responsible translocations mimic elephant movement and dispersal dynamics. Interventions focus on reducing habitat fragmentation and increasing linkages and/or corridors between conservation areas both within and between countries (transboundary conservation areas). However, risks such as disease transmission and human-wildlife conflict should be prevented or minimised.

In addition, a metapopulation approach to the management of elephants could be adopted more broadly. South Africa could act as a reservoir for the rest of southern Africa and contribute elephants to range states within the continent where elephant populations have been extirpated or have decreased over time. Approaches thus focus on ensuring the persistence of elephants, even within a diverse landscape with multiple land uses. However, this will come with challenges as people have little exposure to free-roaming wildlife and there is potential for conflict and risks and challenges associated with this. Legal uncertainties, such as issues of ownership and user rights, are also likely to emerge.

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Elephants are sentient, have cognition and consciousness and are highly social, and have evolved coping strategies to deal with various stresses. Elephant management interventions, thus, embed within a principle of a duty of care, with case-by-case decisions guided by natural processes. This approach includes ensuring the maintenance of viable populations with natural family units and social dependencies, managed according to social structure and natural ways to cope with social disruption.

GOAL 1: Conservation of living landscapes with elephants that enhances biodiversity and ecological resilience.		
Environmental Values	**Strategic Activity**	**Outcomes**
Existence Value: Elephants have intrinsic and existence value as they evolved within their landscapes.	Activity 1.1: Provide a natural environment for elephants that allows them to thrive and cope with stressors.	1. Thriving people, nature and elephants is considered and realised. 2. Expanded, connected, thriving, conservation areas conserve viable populations of elephants in living landscapes, including through co-ordinated partnerships. 3. Resilience and adaptive potential of elephants, including their response to human disturbance and climate change, is maintained and elephant populations are protected. 4. Improved management of fragmented sub-populations ensures a viable national elephant population.
Ecological Role: Elephants influence ecological resilience in how they use landscapes, which intensifies when habitats are fragmented or confined.	Activity 1.2: Maintain, restore or mimic the ecological role of elephants across landscapes. Activity 1.3: Evaluate areas where there is ecological risk from elephants and prevent or mitigate such risks.	
Species persistence: Viable, healthy and resilient populations that improve the persistence of elephants while connecting expanded ranges.	Activity 1.4: Expand connected space for elephants and reduce human influences (including illegal harvesting, trafficking, habitat fragmentation, disease transmission, and human-wildlife conflict), for thriving living landscapes with elephants. Activity 1.5: Management of elephants is evidence-based and follows a National Elephant Metapopulation Framework.	

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Integrated land-use within living landscapes: Opportunities for expansion options, management models and approaches including integration with a range of land uses.	Activity 1.6: Coordinate inclusive community-private-state partnerships to facilitate a dynamic viable elephant metapopulation that expands and connects populations across conserved living landscapes. Activity 1.7: Strengthen transboundary population governance, and elephant protection, conservation, and adaptive management.	

8.2. Social Goal

GOAL 2: *Inclusive living landscapes promote all values of elephants to facilitate social cohesion and strengthen cultural and spiritual connections.*

South Africans have many non-monetary social values linked to elephants. These link to respect for elephants based on moral obligations, ethical considerations and environments that enhance elephant well-being. This imposes a duty of care by South Africans to elephants. South Africans should recognise the importance of considering the diversity of relevant stakeholders, especially their needs and social values, to ensure the upholding of people's dignity. Such respect for people and their views is part of creating a social cohesion of citizenry and highlights a value linked to the importance of a unifying approach. A key element of social cohesion, and a unifying approach to conservation and benefits linked to elephants, is opportunities for equitable livelihoods, particularly to improve access to elephants and their environments. This can promote the well-being of current and future generations of South Africans.

Broadscale consensus highlights that the broader value of elephants and their environments needs to be optimised to benefit all people, including obtaining support from global citizens. Benefits derived from elephants and their environments should be shared beyond the fenced boundaries of protected areas. Many local people have limited access to protected areas, which reduces the value of these areas and species within them (such as elephants). This is especially concerning where local people have lost access to land for conservation or where they are co-owners/managers without deriving benefits. Models where tourists drive through communities to reserves with elephants, without providing direct tangible benefits to these communities (jobs, homestays, cultural tourism, crafts, etc), need reconceptualization. Adjacent communities require access to conservation areas for education both to understand how the park works and for their children to see wildlife, learn to value conservation, and learn about their local history.

Adjacent communities should enjoy, have access to, and realise all the numerous traditional benefits provided by elephants and the environment within which they occur. These include a multitude of medicinal uses that vary between different communities and include by-products that result through elephant life cycles. These include, for example, elephant dung, which has a multitude of medicinal uses varying between different communities, can be used as nutrient-rich compost, or burnt outside of households as an insect repellent, and certain plant species which elephants

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eat have medicinal value which contributes to human medicinal knowledge. In some communities, elephant by-products are used as traditional attire.

GOAL 2: Inclusive living landscapes promote all values of elephants to facilitate social cohesion and strengthen cultural and spiritual connections.		
Social Values	**Strategic Activity**	**Outcomes**
Global benefits: Healthy elephant populations incur costs for South Africa and its people, while providing local and global intergenerational benefits.	Activity 2.1: Use South Africa's national elephant conservation success to enhance its reputation and increase local beneficiation. Activity 2.2: Develop and implement mechanisms and tools for global stakeholders to enhance elephant conservation and its benefits locally.	1. Financial support and incentives are harnessed and leveraged from all sources to ensure the biodiversity sector is adequately resourced and transformed. 2. A prosperous and equitable society living in harmony with nature. 3. Improved livelihoods and well-being of local communities, through meaningful participation and increased more inclusive access and fair benefit sharing. 4. The broad values of ecosystem services are realised and equitably shared among all South Africans. 5. The role of elephants in African cultural and spiritual traditions is respected and strengthened, and, where necessary, restituted and restored.
Proudly South African: Pride and honour of diverse people in the elephant heritage of South Africa.	Activity 2.3: Understand and share the diversity of cultural values of elephants and their importance and communicate this proud South African heritage.	
Human well-being and social cohesion Elephants contribute meaningfully to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals	Activity 2.4: Develop mechanisms and opportunities promoting elephants as flagships in key areas of sustainable and equitable socio-economic development, thereby increasing human well-being and social cohesion.	
Diverse values People have a range of values associated with elephants.	Activity 2.5: Create mechanisms to respect and include diverse stakeholder values from elephants and ensure all can express and enjoy these. Activity 2.6: Harness the diversity of values of elephants to promote a common	

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	purpose to sustain, conserve and use elephants in living landscapes for the well-being of people and elephants.	

8.3. Economic Goal

GOAL 3: *Living landscapes with elephants catalyse inclusive socio-economic development.*

Stakeholders with a high interest in elephant-related issues often influence how people can benefit from elephants, yet they are unaffected in terms of how elephants directly influence their livelihoods and safety. Contrary to this, stakeholders living close to or amongst elephants often face negative consequences from elephants, carrying the burden of the impact of elephants on their lives and livelihoods; for example, elephants leaving reserves and posing a danger to people, livestock, or damaging crops. More equitable socio-economic benefits should go to stakeholders who are directly affected by elephants, and those who have lost access to natural resources due to power issues and the creation of fenced reserves. Notwithstanding this, strong, functional fencing, whether around reserves, or vulnerable villages/agriculture, is key to community safety, but fencing should not prevent the flow of benefits.

Recognising private ownership, and that privately owned land may be important parts of broader living landscapes, such owners need to benefit fairly from their investment. Notwithstanding this, mechanisms for facilitating controlled access for communities across fenced boundaries to benefit needs to be explored. Benefits should also be aligned with responsibilities, vulnerability and needs to ensure equitability. Recognising and using fair socio-economic values derived from the national elephant population have the potential to contribute to the reduction of poverty (SDG 1), the reduction of hunger (SDG 2), decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), reduced inequalities (SDG 10), protection of biodiversity on land (SDG 15) *etc.* as part of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) (https://sdgs.un.org/goals).There are vast values, benefits, and services of elephants, however, diverse sectors and social groups within society value elephants differently. It is important that all sectors of society at least recognise all values ascribed to elephants even though some values may not necessarily be important or even acceptable to a particular segment of society. Economic benefits, services and values associated with elephants include nature-based tourism, community development, hunting, tax beneficiation, conservation, carbon credits and accreditation, amongst many others including social values. Elephants create jobs within and outside protected areas through local businesses associated with such areas. Through private and state investing in elephant-based value chains, elephants are a key element of a thriving wildlife sector. It is important to recognise and support and grow this sector. These economic opportunities should also be optimised to ensure equitable benefits for stakeholders mostly affected by elephants.

Elephants also carry costs for people, may cause damage to property, or place a person's life in danger. Roaming in living landscapes, interactions with people may increase. To prevent or mitigate conflict and damages, and clarify expectations among stakeholders, it is essential to co-develop collective solutions with local communities primarily affected by or responsible for elephants. This also requires ongoing accountability through transparent communication.

Socio-economic opportunities from elephants, their derivatives and their environment can only be optimised if there is fair access to these. Access is often limited because of legislative restrictions, ownership of elephants, and land tenure, preventing optimisation of socio-economic opportunities. Where possible, access to elephants, in general, needs to be improved whilst ensuring that there is sustainable use of the species and its derivatives. Once equitable access to elephants and their derivatives is established, there will be potential to develop small business opportunities created directly around elephants themselves. Derivatives from elephants such as elephant art, curios, hair, leather, ivory, and

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meat, and elephant-based educational programs, cultural activities, etc., have the potential to promote small business opportunities, skill development, and local value-adding. It is essential that marginalised and vulnerable communities living with elephants can access and benefit equitably from use of elephants and their landscapes.

GOAL 3: Living landscapes with elephants catalyse inclusive socio-economic development		
Economic Values	**Strategic Activity**	**Outcomes**
Human-elephant co-existence: Humans and elephants use similar components of biodiversity and can co-exist in landscapes.	Activity 3.1: Unlock social and economic opportunities and conflict prevention/mitigation solutions that address challenges of living with elephants, for the benefit of both the people and nature. Activity 3.2: Develop tools and mechanisms, including Standard Operating Procedures, for protection of, and from, roaming elephants to reduce HEC.	1. Practices and activities that promote sustainable use and equitable benefit sharing. 2. Mitigating human-wildlife conflict and costs on livelihoods. 3. Reducing dis-services promotes support for conservation over alternative land uses. 4. Barriers to entry and participation in the biodiversity economy significantly reduced, and PDIs, youth, women, and people with disabilities become owners and operators of their own businesses within the biodiversity economy value chain.
Fair and inclusive benefits: Living landscapes with elephants grow and expand socio-economic benefits through meaningful partnerships.	Activity 3.3: Support and grow the wildlife economy of privately owned elephants, and the broader benefits that flow from this. Activity 3.4: Empower communities most affected by elephants by apportioning responsibility, accountability, and associated benefits and costs of landscapes with elephants. Activity 3.5: Facilitate effective and efficient conservation and management of elephants through innovative funding mechanisms, including biodiversity management agreements for tax incentives safeguarding elephants.	

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Fair and inclusive access: Equitable opportunities for access to elephants and the environment they live in.	Activity 3.6: Provide opportunities for equitable and fair sharing of benefits, services, and values from elephants and their landscapes.	
Localised socio-economic development: Localised, community-based enterprise based on elephants and their landscapes unlocked.	Activity 3.7: Develop local value chains and markets while empowering local people as owners, partners and beneficiaries of elephants and their landscapes.	

8.4. Enabling Governance

ENABLER 1: *A new deal for people and elephants through co-learning, co-development, innovation and change.*

The strategic objectives of environment, economic and social contributions inadvertently will require trade-offs linked to viable environmental and economic relations, socially equitable economics and bearable social and environmental links. It is acknowledged that the issue of responsibilities of government and their mandates, together with the ownership of elephants, is complex. To effectively conserve, manage and use elephants, all the key role players, particularly principally affected stakeholders, *i.e.*, vulnerable/marginalised communities, conservation managers, industries and state conservation bodies, should participate meaningfully and influence decision-making, albeit guided by different levels of participation. Genuine participation and transparent communication, considering also gender and youth, promotes stakeholder buy-in and support for the implementation of this Strategy and other related tools. Considering the need to weigh values by level of stake and lived experience of stakeholders in decisions and their consequences, devolved decision-making may be most effective, respecting principles of good governance and benefiting from an enabling, responsive regulatory framework, transparency, and accountability. This is particularly important given South Africa's history of past and present social injustices, and requirements to address resultant poverty and inequalities. Marginalised and vulnerable communities suffer most the impacts of Human-Elephant Conflict, and do not have access to all values, benefits and services associated with elephants. Consultations must result in tangible change and benefits, as repeated engagements without these results in stakeholder fatigue and distrust.

In this context, evidence from various sources embraces South Africa's principles of evidence-based decision-making. This requires integration of insights from various sources and cultures, and mutual respect in these. Even so, a key insight already is that elephants are integral and part of ecosystems and do not act as a species in isolation. Governance of elephant management should thus incentivise a proactive systemic approach rather than a symptomatic response.

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ENABLER 1: A new deal for people and elephants through co-learning, co-development, innovation and change.		
Governance Values	**Strategic Activity**	**Outcomes**
Adaptive co-learning Adopting evidence-based best practices, learning from approaches across socio-ecological systems promotes African solutions for African opportunities.	Activity E1.1: Based on the African Elephant Action Plan, use this strategy to initiate an inclusive and participatory community of practice with African range states and stakeholders, allowing for innovative and adaptive co-learning. Activity E1.2: Create an enabling and adaptive environment whereby the evidence-based decision-making and approaches to the conservation, management, and sustainable use of elephants integrates science, experience, indigenous and local knowledge systems and practices.	1. Strengthened multilateralism and advocacy in global biodiversity governance enhance thriving biodiversity in Africa, with a positive contribution to improve planetary health. 2. Inclusive and equitable biodiversity economy with redress, full access, and beneficiation of ecosystem services. 3. Improved governance, co-management, and partnerships, and contribution to the biodiversity economy, with meaningful community participation, influence and benefit. 4. Conservation areas provide access and benefit flows to communities, redressing past injustices. 5. Sustainable use ensures inclusive and meaningful participation in the biodiversity economy, and catalyses rural socio-economic development. 6. The previously disadvantaged groups are empowered as equal and influential participants,
Constitutional justice: South Africa embraces transformation redressing historical injustices, with equitable and fair environmental approaches that address inequalities.	Activity E1.3: Develop appropriate mechanisms and processes which allow for inclusive and meaningful participation of all stakeholders in governance processes, which ensures environmental justice through co-developing, co-learning, co-management and shared decision-making processes, considering historical injustices. Activity E1.4:	

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	Develop an enabling regulatory framework which promotes living landscapes with elephants and people and ensures and facilitates equitable access and benefits. Activity E1.5: Ensure reasonable decision-making processes that are inclusive, justifiable and accountable through transparent mechanisms and practices. Activity E1.6: Ensure state conservation bodies are sufficiently resourced and capacitated to effectively regulate, manage, and facilitate improved access and benefit from elephant conservation and sustainable use.	within an inclusive biodiversity sector. 7. Enhanced and effective biodiversity reporting and trend analysis enhances biodiversity conservation and sustainable use and prevents or mitigates threats.
Systems focus: Elephants benefit socio-ecological systems and do not typically act as a species in isolation that creates problems	Activity E1.7: Develop integrated, systems-oriented mechanisms and tools to balance the environmental, social and economic benefits and costs of elephants, including under future scenarios.	

8.5. Enabling Engagement

ENABLER 2: *Communication, meaningful participation and influence creates African solutions for African opportunities.*

Elephants are valued by people in many ways, with ninety benefits, services, and values associated with elephants having been identified. Based on their culture, traditions, and how closely they are associated with elephants, people prioritise different benefits, services, and values over others. Importantly, in the South African context, the legacy of colonialism and Apartheid imposed a Western and discriminatory framing for elephant conservation and sustainable use, including restricting and limiting access to elephants, and the benefits that traditionally flows from this.

Because of the importance of elephants to people and how their different world views influence their thinking and perspectives, decisions made around elephant conservation and sustainable use are contentious, especially when they involve trade-offs which are needed to achieve viable environmental and economic relations; social equitable economics; and acceptable social and environmental risks.

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Given the contention, the importance of meaningful engagement as a foundation to achieving the vision cannot be overemphasised. Such engagement must be founded on effective communication with integrity, the ability for all stakeholders to participate in processes in an inclusive and equitable manner, which influences outcomes, and by building a shared, common purpose founded on co-learning with understanding. From this can emerge locally relevant solutions that respect both shared and unique values across stakeholders, and which can grow and sustain social cohesion. This includes using local knowledge, skills, and values to provide locally relevant solutions and make the most of what Africa has to offer. It means trusting the people who live with elephants—who know the land, the animals, and the challenges best—to find sustainable, fair, and ethical ways to build a better future for both people and nature.

Fundamental to this, is the creation of a safe engagement space where people can co-learn about elephants and what they mean to diverse people in very different contexts, and the essential role that they play in the environment and society. For communities living with elephants, conservation education at local schools, leadership and internship programmes, training and skills programmes, etc. will create agency and social cohesion within communities for equitable participation and contribution to co-learning.

Importantly and uniquely, elephant owners, managers, and those living alongside elephants are their custodians on behalf of society, and it is essential that their intentions are well-founded, and voiced. Practical solutions, honed to local conditions and circumstances, as well as our shared vision, should emerge from the people closest to the challenges and opportunities. Such solutions, while locally grounded, need to be forward-looking and well-considered, such that they collectively give effect to the aspirations and intent of this National Elephant Heritage Strategy. This can be achieved through harnessing the wisdom and knowledge of individuals, collective co-learning through sharing and referencing to the evidence base and building a cohesive voice that is effectively communicated. Empowering these custodians of elephants is critical for effective engagement with them by all interested and affected stakeholders on whose behalf they act, providing enabling engagement mechanisms to achieve the broader strategy.

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ENABLER 2: Communication, meaningful participation and influence creates African solutions for African opportunities		
Enabling values	**Strategic Activity**	**Outcomes (linked to WP)**
Let the locals lead: Ecological, social and economic benefits arise from elephants at local sites, where managers, owners, and people living with the costs of elephants, make daily decisions.	Activity E2.1: Empower local managers and owners, and people living with elephants through an effective Elephant Management Forum that shares and influences best practice conservation, management, and use. Activity E2.2: Advocate for, and establish, meaningful and equitable participation and influence across stakeholders, including people living with the costs and risks associated with elephants.	1. Integrated and strengthened awareness for people to value, appreciate, and care for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use. 2. Evidence-based best practice in conservation and sustainable use, with effective translation of knowledge, including traditional knowledge, into practice. 3. Clear understanding of the intent and aspirations of South Africa, in promoting the conservation and management of elephants and their landscapes for the well-being of people and nature.
Co-learning: Education and learning about elephants span a range of sources of information shared across diverse cultures that respect and enjoy the elephant heritage of South Africa.	Activity E2.3: Provide mechanisms for co-learning about elephants, their value's, services and benefits to people, and their importance and use across cultures and different contexts.	
Communication: Diverse stakeholders hold or share different perceptions, aspirations and values.	Activity E2.4: Consider peoples' behaviour, attitudes, awareness, needs, and aspirations related to elephants and the role that they play within the environment and society, for cohesive approaches. Activity E2.5. Ensure information is evidence-based, comprehensive, fair, transparent, shared, accessible, and meaningfully engaged with by	

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	stakeholders with different perspectives. Activity E2.6. Develop mechanisms to share South African conservation sustainable use successes, challenges and solutions with local and global audiences.	

9. Implementing the Strategy: Reflection and Adaptation

The strategy emphasises the importance of genuine engagement, participation, influence, co-developing and co-learning. As such, processes and opportunities for dynamic engagement will occur periodically, and systematically, either in terms of the implementation of the overall strategy, or for specific activities envisaged within the strategy. Importantly, there must be ongoing engagement and participation in processes by communities living with elephants, which empowers and creates agency for influence and co-learning for community members.

Such engagements will ensure that there is strong reflection on the process as it unfolds, which will enable adaptive learning, and refinement of the details necessary to successfully implement the process.

It is important that the implementation of the strategy is co-owned by all stakeholders, and initiatives by different stakeholders to lead processes will be supported and encouraged. A key element is establishing transparent reporting mechanisms with responsibility and accountability to all relevant stakeholders, especially communities living with elephants.

This strategy intends to provide a strategic framework for planning and decision-making around living landscapes with elephants. As such, this strategy guides development, revision and implementation of mechanisms and tools, such as the Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants in South Africa (review to facilitate achieving the strategy), the National Elephant Research Strategy (review to ensure gaps in knowledge and understanding are included into the research agenda), the Non-Detrimental Finding for Elephants (science based risk assessment evaluated to include elements covered in the NEHS), the National Elephant Red-list Assessment (to review narrative on conservation, sustainable use, threats etc. that they cover the elements within the NEHS), reserve-level Elephant Management Plans (that the objectives for elephants on the reserve, and how they are then managed and used, consider alignment with the NEHS), National Elephant Meta-Population Plan (that it promotes elephants in living landscapes, with increased linkages between discrete populations with different growths through management to mimic natural processes when necessary and appropriate).

The NEHS will serve as the South African National Elephant Action Plan in terms of the country's implementation of the African Elephant Action Plan, aligning with international obligations and providing a basis for engagement with range states as to how the country is meeting the objectives of the AEAP.

The NEHS will facilitate engagements and consultations regarding elephants in relevant consultative fora, through ensuring that the strategic aspects of elephant conservation and sustainable use are tabled in alignment with the NEHS. The NEHS also forms the basis for applications for funding to support the implementation of the plan.

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These approaches provide the basis for implementing the strategy within an adaptive management framework, with regular reflections to improve outcomes for South Africa, in relation to elephants and their contributions to environmental, social and economic benefits for its people.

The DFFE will broaden the Terms of Reference of the National Elephant Research Advisory Committee to cover supporting the DFFE in coordination and oversight of the implementation of the strategy, and annual reporting on progress.

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ANNEXURE 1: LINKAGES BETWEEN THE NATIONAL ELEPHANT HERITAGE STRATEGY AND THE OUTCOMES OF THE NATIONAL AFRICAN ELEPHANT INDABA.

Table 1: Linkages between the National elephant heritage strategies and the outcomes of the National African Elephant Indaba.

#	Indaba category & action (condensed)	Leads / timeline	Strategy Activity numbers
1	Implement culling when flexible ecological limits are exceeded (sound data)	Provincial authorities; reserve managers — Ongoing	1.3; 1.5
2	Assess & audit reserve fences; ensure maintenance	Provincial authorities; reserve managers — Immediate/Ongoing	1.4; 3.1; 3.2
3	Introduce corridors & buffer zones (range expansion)	Landowners; provincial authorities — Long-term	1.4; 1.5, 1.6
4	Localised fencing to protect fragile ecosystems (e.g., Mapungubwe gallery forest)	Provincial authorities — Ongoing	1.3; 1.4
5	Use of technology & focused monitoring (collars, drones, AI) for ecological thresholds	Entities; provincial conservation authorities — Short-term	1.5; E1.2
6	Clear alien/invasive species around reserves	National/provincial authorities & AIS leads — Ongoing	1.1; 1.2
7	Population/spatial modelling & ecological impact analysis	DFFE & entities — Ongoing	1.5
8	Integrate flexible ecological limits in PA management plans	Provincial conservation authorities — Short-term	1.3; 1.5
9	HEC SOPs per reserve	Landowners & regulators with communities	3.2
10	Rapid-response teams for escapes/conflict	Provincial authorities; community monitors — Immediate	3.1; 3.2
11	Low-cost deterrents (chilli bricks/grease, alarms)	Communities; provincial authorities — Ongoing	3.1; 3.2

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12	"Small indabas" / HWC forums in hotspots	Provincial authorities — Short-term	E2.1; E2.2; E2.3
13	Resolve land-rights issues (restitution/labour tenants)	DFFE; Restitution Commission — Medium-term	E1.3; E1.4
14	Compensation opportunities for affected communities	Provincial authorities — Short/Medium term	3.1; 3.5
15	Compensation/insurance/funds for elephant damage	DFFE; provincial; People & Parks; other depts — Medium-term	3.5
16	Benefit sharing with affected communities	Local conservation authorities — Ongoing	3.3; 3.4; 3.6
17	Awareness, education & capacity-building	Provincial conservation authorities — Ongoing	E2.3; E2.4; E2.5
18	Women & youth capacity-building (People & Parks)	DFFE; People & Parks — Short/Med/Long	E2.3; E1.3
19	Promote indigenous/traditional knowledge in HWC	DFFE; communities — Ongoing	E1.2
20	Community monitors in hotspots	Provincial conservation authorities — Immediate	3.1; E2.1
21	Integrate cultural & spiritual values in coexistence	Provincial authorities; communities — Ongoing	2.3; 2.5; 2.6
22	Include Traditional Health Practitioners	DFFE — Short/Medium	2.5
23	Tolerance-building by demonstrating value of elephants	DFFE & stakeholders — Ongoing	2.3; E2.6
24	Integrate communities into value chains & enterprises	DFFE; provincial — Ongoing	3.4; 3.6; 3.7
25	Multiple income streams	Provinces; landowners with communities — Short-term	3.3; 3.4; 3.7
26	Hire rangers/monitors (local jobs)	Provincial conservation authorities — Short-term	3.7
27	Mobilise resources for fences/habitat/monitoring	DFFE; govt; private; provinces — Short/Med/Long	3.5

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28	Private-sector partnerships (tech, nature-based tourism)	DFFE; landowners — Ongoing	3.3; E1.1
29	Review & revise Elephant Norms & Standards	DFFE — Start by Nov 2025	E1.4
30	Finalise & gazette National Elephant Heritage Strategy	DFFE & entities — 2025–2026	E1.1; E1.4
31	Guidelines for damage-causing elephants	DFFE — Nov 2025	3.2; E1.4
32	Task teams/working groups for implementation	DFFE — Immediate	E1.1; E1.5
33	Streamline permits for managing DCAs	Issuing authorities — Short-term	E1.4
34	Clarify ownership & res nullius	DFFE; legal experts — Short-term	E1.4
35	Transfrontier collaboration (TFCAs)	DFFE; regional partners — Ongoing	1.7
36	Comms plan on management, culling, conflict	DFFE; provinces — Ongoing	E2.4; E2.5; E2.6
37	Benchmark successful examples (e.g., Addo)	DFFE & entities — Short-term	E1.1; E1.7
38	Timely approval of Elephant Management Plans	DFFE & MECs — Immediate	1.5; E1.6

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ANNEXURE 2: NATIONAL ELEPHANT INDABA REPORT.

forestry, fisheries & the environment
Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

KEY RESOLUTIONS AND ACTIONS EMANATED FROM THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN ELEPHANT INDABA: "PEOPLE AND ELEPHANTS THRIVING TOGETHER" HELD FROM 12 TO 13 AUGUST 2025 IN KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA.

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1.1 The Southern African Elephant Indaba was convened on 12 to 13 August 2025 in Bonamanzi Game Reserve, KwaZulu-Natal, out of an urgent need to redefine the narrative and management of elephants in South Africa. The current National Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants in South Africa, published in 2008, does not adequately address the broader strategic policy aspects such as meta-population management, equitable benefit sharing, or the complexities of fragmented populations. South Africa's elephant populations, though increasing, often exist in small, isolated areas, leading to challenges like habitat degradation and human-elephant conflict (HEC). Furthermore, a history of social injustices has often excluded communities from decision-making processes and the benefits derived from elephants.

1.2 The Indaba aimed to foster a collective aspiration: to ensure healthy elephant populations that not only realise biodiversity goals but also strengthen cultural and spiritual connections. The broader objective was to provide fair and inclusive opportunities for sustainable and dignified lives for all current and future generations. The desired outcome was a future where sustainable development is cognisant of the everchanging elephant-based biodiversity. To actualise this vision, a broad spectrum of stakeholders met to discuss policy reform, adaptive management, local empowerment, and fostered collaborative transfrontier conservation efforts. This unified approach seeks to create a "new deal" for people and elephants, founded on co-learning, co-development, and innovation.

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1.3 Outlined below is a summary of the key resolutions and priority actions that emerged from the Indaba. These outcomes reflect the collective insights, commitments, and strategic directions agreed upon by stakeholders to advance the shared vision for sustainable elephant conservation and inclusive development.

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2. THE RESOLUTIONS FROM THE CONFERENCE: A CALL TO ACTION FOR ELEPHANT HERITAGE

Resolution	Focus	First Steps	Timeline	Leads and support
2.1 Finalise and Gazette the National Elephant Heritage Strategy; table to MINMEC and Parliament	Secure political and legislative support for a unified national strategy	- Compile and integrate Indaba inputs - Finalise draft - Submit to legal services - Present to MINMEC & Parliament	By 2025/26 FY	DFFE (lead), MINMEC, Parliament
2.2 Review and revise the National Norms and Standards for Elephant Management	Align norms and standards with National Elephant Heritage Strategy	- Establish technical task team - Gap analysis of current standards - Draft revisions - Stakeholder consultations	Start Nov 2025; complete by Dec 2026	DFFE (lead), Technical and Scientific Advisory Group
2.3 Finalise Guideline on Damage Causing Animals	Provide clear framework for managing problem elephants	- Circulate final draft for comment - Secure legal review - Publish guideline	Early 2026	DFFE
2.4 Integrate Indaba actions into existing tools/projects	Strengthen synergy and avoid duplication	- Map Indaba actions against current initiatives - Incorporate into GEF7 HWC project & provincial reports - Monitor implementation	Ongoing, with 2026 review	DFFE, Provincial Authorities, Project Teams
2.5 Establish platforms for engagement to mobilise resources	Unlock financial/technical support	- Convene stakeholder roundtable - Create donor database - Develop investment proposals	By mid-2026	DFFE (lead), Treasury, Partners
2.6 Strengthen collaboration to reduce HEC (domestic, regional, private sector)	Coordinated elephant management & innovation	- Form domestic multi-stakeholder forum - Engage TFCA secretariats for cross-border planning - Host innovation workshop with private sector	Initiate 2025, ongoing annually	DFFE, Provinces, TFCA Secretariats, Private Sector
2.7 Ensure reserves are managed per plans & ecological limits, with accountability	Improve governance & compliance in reserve management	- Conduct compliance audits - Update reserve management plans - Introduce penalties for neglect	Start 2026; annual reporting	Provincial Conservation Authorities, Landowners, DFFE

2.8 Mobilise resources for fence maintenance & elephant management needs	Ensure financial sustainability via utilisation opportunities	- Develop costed fence maintenance plan - Explore revenue from tourism, culling - Establish transparent fund for reinvestment	By 2026, ongoing	DFFE, Private Sector, Communities
2.9 Include communities in biodiversity economy value chain	Enhance livelihoods & reduce conflict	- Identify community beneficiation opportunities - Link communities to nature-based tourism operations - Develop employment programmes	Begin 2026; ongoing	DFFE, Communities, NGOs, Private Sector
2.10 Ensure transparency on culling operations & improve communication	Build public trust & accountability	- Develop communication protocol - Publish annual culling reports - Engage media & communities proactively	Immediate, with first report 2026	DFFE (lead), Provinces

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3. THE WAY FORWARD: IGNITING A LEGACY OF THRIVING CO-EXISTENCE

The path ahead, strengthened by the spirit of collaboration and shared responsibility from this Indaba, is clear and compelling. We stand at the precipice of a new era, armed with shared knowledge and renewed determination. The immediate next steps are crucial for translating these aspirations into tangible realities:

3.1 Finalise and Gazette the National Elephant Heritage Strategy by 2025/2026, and table it to MINMEC and Parliament to secure political and legislative support.

3.2 Initiate the review and revision of the National Norms and Standards for the Management of Elephants by November 2025

3.3 Finalise the Guideline on Damage Causing Animals

3.4 Integrate actions from the Southern African Elephant Indaba into existing tools and projects, such as the GEF7 Human-Wildlife Conflict project and provincial elephant reports.

3.5 Establish platforms for engagement to facilitate resource mobilisation.

3.6 Strengthen collaboration to reduce HEC: domestically with provinces and all key stakeholders; regionally through Transfrontier Conservation Areas for coordinated cross-border elephant management and with private sector to explore beneficial technologies and innovations

3.7 Ensure reserves are managed in line with management plans and ecological limits, granting greater sense of ownership to managers and those impacted, while ensuring accountability of landowners and reserve managers, with penalties for neglect.

3.8 Mobilise resources for fence maintenance and other elephant management needs, harnessing utilisation opportunities (e.g., nature-based tourism, culling) to support financial sustainability.

3.9 Ensure communities are included in the biodiversity economy value chain and create meaningful employment opportunities.

3.10 Ensure transparency from government entities regarding culling operations and improve communication with the public, thereof.

This is not merely a bureaucratic process; it is a shared promise—a commitment to our natural heritage, to our communities, and to the magnificent elephants that symbolise the wild heart of Africa.

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4. GENERAL ACTIONS

The Elephant Indaba highlighted a pressing need for a multi-faceted approach to elephant management, encompassing legislative review, community empowerment, and ecological stewardship. The following table summarises the general actions proposed during the conference, outlining responsibilities and anticipated timelines.

No.	The Action	Leads Responsibility (*in consultation with other key partners)	Proposed Timeline
Environmental Actions (Habitat, Population & Ecological Management)			
1.	Implement culling when flexible ecological limits[2] are exceeded based on sound data	Provincial Authorities, Reserve Managers/Ecologists	Ongoing
2.	Assess and audit reserve fences, ensuring robust maintenance	Provincial Authorities, Reserve Managers	Immediate / Ongoing
3.	Introduce elephant corridors and buffer zones where ecologically feasible (aligned to range expansion)	Landowners, Provincial Authorities	Long-term
4.	Localised fencing to protect fragile ecosystems and cultural sites (e.g., Mapungubwe gallery forest)	Provincial Authorities	Ongoing
5.	Deploy technologies and focussed monitoring to manage ecological thresholds (e.g., collars, drones, AI for habitat monitoring)	Entities, Provincial Conservation Authorities	Short-term
6.	Clear alien and invasive species around reserves and buffer zones	National, Provincial Authorities and stakeholder organisations/lead agencies in AIS clearing	Ongoing

[2] Instead of fixed carrying capacities, we work with **flexible ecological limits** — boundaries that shift over time and across landscapes, depending on rainfall, climatic conditions, veld, habitat and vegetation recovery, water availability, and human pressures.

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No.	The Action	Leads Responsibility (*in consultation with other key partners)	Proposed Timeline
7.	Conduct population and spatial use modelling and ecological impact analysis to inform planning	DFFE & Entities	Ongoing
8.	Integrate ecological flexible ecological limits into protected-area management plans to monitor, inform and manage the ways in which elephants affect reserve objectives	Provincial Conservation Authorities	Short-term
Social Actions (Conflict Mitigation, Coexistence & Empowerment)			
1.	Develop Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for each reserve in terms of HEC	Landowners (Elephant Custodians and Regulators) working with communities	
2.	Establish rapid-response teams for elephant escapes and conflict incidents	Provincial Authorities, Community Monitors	Immediate
3.	Implement low-cost, community-based deterrent methods (e.g., chilli bricks, dung bricks, chilli grease, alarms)	Communities[3], Provincial Authorities	Ongoing
4.	Engage communities and directly affected stakeholders through “small indabas/HWC forums” in hotspots to co-design coexistence solutions	Provincial Authorities	Short-term
5.	Resolve land-rights issues affecting HWC areas, e.g., restitution and labour tenant claims	DFFE, Restitution Commission	Medium-term
6.	Explore opportunities to compensate communities affected by damage caused by elephants	Provincial Authorities	Short to medium term
7.	Develop compensation mechanisms, insurance, and funds to offset damages caused by elephants	DFFE, Provincial Authorities, People and Parks and other key partners	Medium-term

[3] Communities: the responsibility of communities refers to direct involvement and support on the actions stipulated.

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No.	The Action	Leads Responsibility (*in consultation with other key partners)	Proposed Timeline
		(National Departments of: Agriculture and Rural Development)	
8.	Include affected communities in benefits from elephant utilisation (e.g., access to meat, cultural uses of by-products)	Local Conservation Authorities	Ongoing
9.	Introduce community awareness, education, and capacity-building programmes for people living alongside elephants	Provincial Conservation Authorities	Ongoing
10.	Implement specific capacity-building initiatives in accordance with the People & Parks Programme, targeting women and youth	DFFE, People and Parks	Short to medium to long term
11.	Promote indigenous and traditional knowledge in shaping local HWC solutions	DFFE, Communities	Ongoing
12.	Employ community monitors for proactive tracking of elephant movements in hotspots	Provincial Conservation Authorities	Immediate
13.	Integrate cultural values and spiritual relationships into coexistence frameworks	Provincial Authorities, Communities	Ongoing
14.	Include Traditional Health Practitioners in engagements to optimise the sustainable use of elephants in traditional use practices	DFFE	Short to medium term
15.	Strengthen tolerance-building by demonstrating elephants' ecological and cultural value	DFFE & Stakeholders	Ongoing
Economic Actions (Biodiversity Economy & Sustainable Livelihoods)			
1.	Integrate communities into elephant-based value chains and local enterprises	DFFE, Provincial Authorities	Ongoing
2.	Develop multiple income streams from reserves, taking into account social, environmental and economic considerations e.g. nature-based tourism , culling — for equitable benefit-sharing	Provincial Authorities, Landowners (Elephant Custodians and Regulators) working with communities	Short-term

No.	The Action	Leads Responsibility (*in consultation with other key partners)	Proposed Timeline
3.	Employ additional permanent rangers and monitors to strengthen local job creation	Provincial Conservation Authorities	Short-term
4.	Mobilise resources and ensure appropriate allocation for fencing, habitat protection, and community-driven monitoring	DFFE, relevant government departments, Private Sector, Provincial Authorities	Short to medium to long term)
5.	Partner with the private sector to invest in technology, Nature based tourism, and innovative livelihoods	DFFE, Landowners	Ongoing
Enabling Environment (Policy Reform, Institutions & Cross-Border Cooperation)			
1.	Review and revise National Norms & Standards for Elephant Management[4]	DFFE	Start by Nov 2025
2.	Finalise and gazette the National Elephant Heritage Strategy; secure MinTech, MINMEC & Parliamentary support and ensure alignment with the Norms and Standards	DFFE & Entities	2025–2026
3.	Develop national guidelines for managing damage-causing elephants	DFFE	Nov 2025
4.	Establish task teams and working groups to oversee implementation of Indaba outcomes	DFFE	Immediate
5.	Streamline permit processes for managing damage-causing elephants	Issuing Authorities	Short-term
6.	Clarify elephant ownership and responsibilities by reviewing the *res nullius* principle	DFFE, Legal Experts	Short-term
7.	Foster cross-border collaboration through Transfrontier Conservation Areas (TFCAs)	DFFE, Regional Partners	Ongoing
8.	Development and implementation of a communication plan on management, culling and conflict solutions	DFFE, Provincial Authorities	Ongoing

[4] The review of the Norms and Standards of the Management of elephants will enable the exploration of other possible policy options/interventions (eg. Guidelines).

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No.	The Action	Leads Responsibility (*in consultation with other key partners)	Proposed Timeline
9.	Benchmark against successful elephant management examples (e.g., Addo)	DFFE & Entities	Short-term
10.	Ensure timely approval of Elephant Management Plans (EMPs) to avoid operational delays	DFFE & MECs	Immediate

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5. DEVELOPMENT OF THE REPORT

The draft report was developed by the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, SANParks and SANBI. This collaborative initiative was supported by key stakeholders from provinces, People and Parks (community representation), traditional leaders, industry, NGOs, animal welfare organisation/s.

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6. PROPSALS FOR HOTSPOTS, PROVINCIAL, AND SANCTUARY-SPECIFIC AREAS (FEEDBACK FROM GROUP DISCUSSIONS)

The discussions at the Indaba highlighted the critical need for context-specific interventions in areas experiencing high levels of human-elephant conflict (HWC). These strategies often involve a blend of infrastructural, technological, and community-based solutions, recognising the diverse impacts on affected parties and leveraging local knowledge and practices.

The following proposed actions for the human-elephant conflict areas are a work-in-progress, whereby consultations with relevant stakeholders within provinces and hotspot areas will be convened to ensure that the proposed actions below, are refined and aligned with the needs of the respective areas.

6.1 **Mawana**: It is identified as a hotspot requiring urgent intervention.

Action/Intervention
Mobilise resources to fence Mawana and enclose all Mawana elephants inside
For elephants that continue to cause damage; the intervention includes the destruction of damage-causing animals in line with applicable prescripts.
To enhance proactive management; the employment of monitors to track elephant escapes and the establishment of a rapid response team are recommended.
Technological and biological methods like beehives and contraceptive methods are also to be considered as deterrents and population control measures.
A significant focus is placed on addressing the impacts on affected communities through compensation, with owners being compelled to contribute.
Address competing land rights, involving the Restitution Commission to resolve issues for labour tenants and restitution claimants
Implement community-based practices, such as the use of beehives as a deterrent, are seen as vital, aligning with local engagement and seeking practical, on-the-ground solutions to reduce conflict and build tolerance

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6.2 **Mapungubwe**: In Mapungubwe, the interventions primarily focus on the dynamics of free-roaming elephants in a transboundary context. The context here is particularly sensitive due to elephants impacting the gallery forest, which is part of the cultural heritage site, leading to localised fencing to exclude elephants from specific areas around Mapungubwe Hill.

Action/Intervention
Strengthen relationships between countries that share borders where elephants move freely. This highlights the need for a collaborative international approach to elephant management.
Formulate specific management plan for these free-roaming elephants
Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of various authorities involved
Approve culling plans submitted by applicants
Explore different methods and techniques for managing elephant populations
Destroy DCAs

6.3 **Other Hotspot Interventions:** Provinces: KZN, Mpumalanga, North West and Limpopo (Mkuze, Songimvelo – Mpumalanga, Sphelanyane and Matsulu (Mthethomusha))

Action/Intervention	Site
Clear alien species in protected area and nature reserve border areas	Mkhuze
Engage communities: convene "small indabas" in these areas to identify the root causes of human-elephant conflict	All
Employ monitors to detect elephant escapes and provide rapid response teams	All
Fencing and maintenance is critical, requiring erection and ongoing upkeep of barriers. Ensure dedicated and sustainable funding.	Tembe and Ndumo reserves, Songimvelo, Mpumalanga
Erection and maintenance of adequate fencing	Sphelanyane and Matsulu
Empower rural farmers to use low-cost, locally adapted deterrence methods, such as chillies, dung bricks, chilli grease, and simple alarm systems	All
Integrate communities into the economic value chain and local enterprises to ensure they experience the value from elephants	All

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Across these hotspots, community-based methods and beliefs play a crucial role in shaping HWC approaches. As Elephants are intelligent, have strong family bonds, and operate within highly socialised groups, emphasizing that interventions should minimise unnecessary disruption of these groups. However, elephants are also recognised as engineers of ecosystems. In addition, most communities have deep-rooted non-monetary values linked to elephants, including moral obligations and ethical considerations, imposing a "duty of care". Traditional benefits from elephants such as dung for medicinal uses, maggots, and by-products for attire are significant to adjacent communities.

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