

# MINISTRY OF TOURISM & WILDLIFE



## OFFICE OF PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Telephone +254 2- 3313010  
Fax +254 20 3318043/5  
18<sup>th</sup> Floor, Room 1801

TELEPOSTA TOWERS GPO  
P.O.BOX 30027-00100  
NAIROBI

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday: 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2018

### **CABINET SECRETARY SUSPENDS BLACK RHINO TRANSLOCATION FOLLOWING DEATHS**

Hon. Najib Balala, Cabinet Secretary for Tourism & Wildlife has today directed the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) to immediately suspend the ongoing translocation of black rhinos following the death of eight of them. The rhinos were being translocated from Nairobi and Nakuru National Parks to the newly-created sanctuary in Tsavo East National Park being supported by WWF-Kenya.

Rhino translocation and immobilization for various management purposes in Kenya has been a success story with very low mortality rates over the years. Between 2005 and 2017, one hundred and forty-nine (149) rhinos have been translocated with eight (8) mortalities, excluding the current

deaths in Tsavo East N. Park - 11 translocated with eight fatalities.

Further, between July 2017 and February 2018, 74 rhinos have been immobilized for ear-notching and only 1 mortality was reported. Several tens have also been successfully immobilized for clinical intervention.

Preliminary investigations by KWS veterinary teams attribute the deaths to salt poisoning as a result of taking water of high salinity on arrival in the new environment. These findings are consistent with cases of salt poisoning in other animal species, indicating a challenge in the translocated rhinos' adaptation to the change from fresh water to saline water in the sanctuary. The high salt levels lead to dehydration that triggers thirst mechanism, resulting in excess water intake of the saline water that further exacerbates the problem.

The eight dead rhinos were among 11 that had been moved to the sanctuary in an initiative to start a new population in line with the National Rhino Conservation and Management Strategy. A total of 14 rhinos had been planned to be translocated.

This kind of mortality rate is unprecedented in KWS operations and this has necessitated CS Balala to order for the invitation of external and independent investigations.

Subsequently, we invited Prof. Peter Gathumbi, a Senior Veterinary Pathologist from University of Nairobi, to Tsavo to carry out independent investigations, where he collected samples on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2018 and would present his report in a week's time.

We have also sought input from Dr. Markus Hoffmeyer, a Wildlife Conservationist, Rhino Veterinarian and translocation expert from South Africa.

Meanwhile, the four remaining rhinos are being closely monitored by veterinary and park management teams and are being provided with fresh water in temporary water pans, as we await the full postmortem examination report and further forensic investigations.

We will make the investigation results public as soon as we receive them.

Disciplinary action will definitely be taken, if the findings point towards negligence or unprofessional misconduct on the part of any KWS officers.

**-ENDS-**



**MULEI MUIA**  
**DIRECTOR, PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS DIVISION**

**[muleimuia@tourism.go.ke](mailto:muleimuia@tourism.go.ke); [info@tourism.go.ke](mailto:info@tourism.go.ke)**

**0722 516 610, 0733 516 610**

**[www.tourism.go.ke](http://www.tourism.go.ke)**

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