

# Batswana set to weigh in on whether ban on elephant hunting should be lifted

July 5 2018, by Keith Somerville

---



Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The government of President Mokgweetsi Masisi in Botswana [has announced](#) that it will hold a two-month nationwide consultation to review the ban on hunting, notably of elephants. The ban, introduced by Masisi's predecessor, Ian Khama in 2014, has come under [increasing criticism](#) from people living in areas with significant wildlife populations

as well as impoverished communities previously reliant on hunting income.

The announcement of the consultation followed [a vote](#) in the country's parliament calling for the government to consider lifting the hunting ban on [elephants](#). The motion was put before parliament by Konstantinos Markus, a member of the governing Botswana Democratic Party of President Masisi. The consultation will be run by the minister of local government and rural development.

Markus, who got support of a majority of MPs from all parties, [argued that there were several factors](#) necessitating the lifting of the ban. These included the increase in Botswana's elephant population, the growing conflict between people and elephants (such as crops being destroyed and people's lives being endangered) and the loss to [local communities](#) of income from hunting. He also argued that the ban contradicted the aims of one of the country's key conservation efforts designed to contribute to rural development.

It's significant that the environment and tourism ministry isn't running the process. Given that it's the local government and rural development ministry in charge the focus is likely to be on rural livelihoods rather than environmental protection.

## **The history of the ban**

Hunting was banned by President Ian Khama in January 2014. The decision followed [a survey on Botswana's wildlife](#). It suggested that a number of species were declining in northern Botswana, where most sports and commercial hunting occurred. It found that ostrich numbers had fallen by 95%, wildebeest 90%, tsessebe 84%, warthog and kudu 81% and giraffes (66%) between 1966 and 2011.

A weakness of the survey was that it only looked at the numbers and failed to take into account what had caused declines, or what the long-term trends or seasonal factors were.

Khama and his brother Tshekedi, who was minister of the environment and natural resources, blamed the decline on hunting. With urging from animal rights NGOs as well as [some wildlife filmmakers](#) they opted to ban sports and most forms of commercial hunting, blaming them for species decline.

But a [study carried out by Joseph Mbaiwa](#) of the Okavango Research Unit at the University of Botswana, found that the ban was "not supported by any scientific evidence, and there was no involvement of local communities in the decision-making process."

Mbaiwa found that the ban was opposed in local communities where there had been [hunting](#). This was because it had contributed significantly to incomes which they'd lost. In addition, wildlife was increasingly damaging crops while increased livestock farming in the wake of ban was affecting water resources.



Elephant damage to the Mopane woodlands in Linyanti, northern Botswana.  
Author Supplied

[Mbaiwa also](#) found that rural communities had lost an important source of meat which provided vital protein.

## **Why MPs oppose the ban**

The combination of lost income, increased conflict with wildlife and increased poaching all weighed on MPs minds when they voted overwhelmingly to call on the government to reconsider the ban. Markus



[tabled his motion](#) as a matter of "urgent public importance. He said the urgency was partly due to the latest figures showing a national elephant population of 237,000, compared with a carrying capacity of 50,000.

He also argued that the "expansion of the elephant population in Botswana has impoverished communities, especially those in Boteti, Ngamiland, Chobe or northern Botswana where crop damage and lack of harvest due to elephants is prevalent."

The size of the [elephant population](#) is hard to pin down accurately as huge numbers migrate between Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia and Angola. The [Great Elephant Census survey](#) carried out in 2014 put the population at 130,451, but the 2012 dry season survey showed 207,545.

Possible explanations for the fluctuation in numbers could include migration as well as seasonal factors rather than an outright decline.

## **What happens next?**

The consultation process is due to start when the current parliamentary session ends in the first week of August. It will involve a series of traditional [kgotla meetings](#) – public meetings at which everyone is allowed to have their say before leaders come to a decision.

It's significant that the chair process is being chaired by the minister responsible for rural livelihoods rather than Tshekedi Khama, the environment minister, who was one of the chief proponents of the ban.

One reason for this decision may be that the new president, who replaced Ian Khama on 1 April 2018, wants to placate an increasing number of BDP MPs, local councillors and chiefs who say the ban is damaging the livelihoods of people in rural areas and having a bad effect

on [rural development](#). If these issues aren't resolved the party risks losing rural votes in Ngamiland in elections next year.

There are likely to be very heated debates in the coming months as the government weighs up whether to lift the ban to meet popular demand and economic reality, or whether the Khama factor will still weigh heavily on the decision.

This article was originally published on [The Conversation](#). Read the [original article](#).

Provided by The Conversation

Citation: Botswana set to weigh in on whether ban on elephant hunting should be lifted (2018, July 5) retrieved 5 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-07-botswana-elephant.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--