

Fierce divide as Botswana lifts hunting ban

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Botswana says lifting the ban will not threaten the elephant population

Many conservationists on Thursday reacted with anger over Botswana's decision to lift its blanket ban on hunting, describing it as a "horrifying" move, though others backed the idea.

Botswana fended off criticism of its decision to end the five-year ban, saying the move would not threaten the elephant population.

A government statement said the cabinet had been influenced by the "high levels of human-elephant conflict" and its "impact on livelihoods".

"Predators appear to have increased and were causing a lot of damage as they killed livestock in large numbers," it said.

"The general consensus from those consulted was that the hunting ban should be lifted."

A blanket hunting ban was introduced in 2014 by then-president Ian Khama, a keen environmentalist, to reverse a decline in the population of wild animals.

But lawmakers from the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) have been lobbying for the policy change, saying wild animal numbers have become unmanageable in some areas.

Environment minister Kitso Mokaila said the government had found itself in the firing line over the decision.

"We are trying to come up with solutions and yet we seem to be the guys that are targeted for abuse," he said, adding that many lives had been lost.

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