

**An evaluation of the *Phragmites australis* reed use by
communities neighbouring the Tembe Elephant Park,
Maputaland, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa**

by

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ABSTRACT

The commercial harvesting of *Phragmites australis* reeds in the Tembe Elephant Park, Maputaland, KwaZulu-Natal was investigated to determine the impact of reed use on the Muzi Swamp. The reed quality in the harvesting areas within the Tembe Elephant Park has deteriorated over time, with the reeds in the harvested areas being by and large shorter and thinner than the reeds in the other areas of the reserve where harvesting is not allowed. The impact of continuous harvesting in combination with the accidental burning of certain areas in the Muzi Swamp was also found to be detrimental to reed production when compared to other treatments. Poor rural communities neighbouring the Tembe Elephant Park are largely dependent on the reed resource for both income supplementation and for use in the construction of dwellings. Reeds offer a cheaper alternative to the more western building materials, which is of utmost importance in an area where the mean yearly income is around

ZAR 6000 per annum. The manufacture of prefabricated reed and forest timber huts by the local reed harvesters in the summer months would facilitate a winter only harvest, which is more beneficial and is integral to the improvement of the long-term reed quality in the Muzi Swamp. In addition, the cost of these proposed prefabricated reed and forest timber huts is approximately one third of the cost of a similar sized hut that is constructed from bricks and cement. Management recommendations for the controlled harvesting area in Muzi Swamp of the Tembe Elephant Park, as well as the section of the Muzi Swamp that is not afforded protection by Ezemvelo KwaZulu-Natal Wildlife, are also presented.

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