



The images above are taken from Living Limpopo's website.

## MMSEZ Applications for the Destruction of Protected Trees

On 12 August 2024, All Rise, acting on behalf of the Vhembe Biosphere Reserve, Herd Reserve, Living Limpopo and the Centre for Applied Legal Studies (CALS), JL Du Preez & Sons CC, submitted a PAIA application to the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment for copies of applications made and/or permits issued to destroy or remove protected trees in the Vhembe area.

The most shocking application submitted was for the south site, which is an application to destroy over 648 000 trees, 10 000 of which are baobab trees.

Below is a short summary of the applications made and licences issued based on the information received from DFFE in response to the PAIA request:

### North Site applications:

1. Year: 08/10/2020  
Applicant: LEDA  
Location: Portion 091 of Farm Antonvilla 7MT, Musina Local Municipality  
Number of trees: 10 000
2. Year: 25/05/2022  
Applicant: MMSEZ  
Location: Portion 0 and 1 of Farm Antonvilla  
Number of trees: 10 000
3. Year: 05/2023  
Applicant:  
Location: Portion 0 and 1 of Farm Antonvilla

4. Year: 11/2023  
Applicant: MMSEZ  
Location: Portion 0 and 1 of Farm Antonvilla  
Number of trees: 9 000
5. Year: 13/05/2024 (extension of previous application)  
Applicant: MMSEZ  
Location: Portion 0 and 1 of Farm Antonvilla  
Number of trees: 1000

#### **South Site application**

1. **Document signed:** 10 August 2022  
**Applicant:** MMSEZ  
**Licence period:** 2 years  
**Location:** Limpopo Province, Vhembe District Municipality, Musina Local Municipality, Musina Town  
**Property Name and Numbers:** Dreyer 526MS, Joffre 584 MS, Antrobus 566MS, Battle 585MS, Steenbok 565MS, Van der bijl 528MS, Lekkerlag 580 MS and Somme 611 MS  
**Name of farm:** Dreyer, Joffre, Battle, Steenbok, Van der bijl, Lekkerlag, and Somme  
**Name the protected trees applied for:**

Species name	Condition	Number of trees
Adansonia digitata	Alive	10,000
Boscia albitrunca	Alive	100,000
Combretum imberbe	Alive	428,058
Sclerocarya birrea subsp. caffra	Alive	120,000

**Estimated mass of trees:** 2 500 000 kg

#### **North Site Licences:**

1. **Licence Number:** LP-VDM-01102023-24 [ANTONVILLA FARM]  
**Licence Holder:** MMSEZ  
**Years of validity for licence:** 16 May 2023 to 16 May 2024  
**Location:** Portion 0 and 1 of Farm Antonvilla 7MT, Musina Local Municipality  
**Species and number of trees:** (40) Baobab trees (Adansonia digitata), 450 Shepherd trees (Boscia albitrunca), (160) Leadwood trees (Combretum imberbe) and (350) Marula trees (Sclerocarya birre subsp. caffra)  
**Total number of trees:** 1,000  
**Specific conditions:**
  - A replacement per each tree removed at a ratio of 1:5 must be complied with (Total No. of 5000 trees)
  - Replacement of trees should be done in three phases (1 500 trees per year starting from 2023)
  - A monthly register of tree/s removed must be reported to DFFE by MMSEZ
2. **Licence Number:** LP-VDM-0041-2024-25 E1  
**Licence holder:** MMSEZ  
**Years of validity for licence:** 20 May 2024- 20 May 2025  
**Location:** Portion 0 and 1 of Farm Antonvilla, Musina Local Municipality  
**Permission given to cut live trees**  
**Species and number of trees:** 450 Small, Medium & Large specie Boscia Albitrunca (Shepherd's tree), (40) Small, Medium & Large specie Adansonia digitata (Baobab trees), (160) Small, Medium & Large specie Combretum Imberbe (Lead

Wood Trees) and (350) Small, Medium & Large specie Sclerocarya birrea subs. Caffra (Marula trees)

**Total number of trees:** 1,000

**Specific conditions:**

- MMSEZ to plant back trees in a ratio of 1:5 (1000x5=5000) within the duration of the licence.
- The DFFE will provide tree planting beneficiaries
- No part of the trees may be transported without any form of permit/licence.
- Licence no LP-VDM-0011-2023-24 is the extension of Licence no LP-VDM-0041-24-25 E1

It is important to note that although a permit application for the destruction of protected trees specifies the total number of protected trees to be destroyed, a permit is not required for all the indigenous trees and vegetation that are not protected in terms of the Biodiversity Act. Therefore, the total number of trees that will be destroyed is estimated to be in the region of 4.8 million.

The PAIA application was submitted with a letter to the Director-General of the DFFE. This letter stated that the area forms part of the Vhembe Biosphere Reserve, which is rich in biodiversity and important for the protection of indigenous trees such as the Shepherd trees, Marula trees, and Baobab trees. These trees and the surrounding biodiversity are a natural carbon sink, contributing to the sequestration of carbon. This sequestration of carbon is a necessity as it contributes to combating climate change. The reserve hosts a unique ecosystem, which provides ecosystem services to the area and provides natural resources used in the local informal economy.

Biodiversity and carbon credit generation capacity are ultimately dependent on intact, functioning natural ecosystems as natural infrastructure. Issuing licences for the removal of thousands of indigenous trees will severely disrupt the ecosystems and the provision of ecosystem services and destroy the high biodiversity value of the area. The irreversible environmental damage comes at the expense of farming and the emerging nature-based economy in the Vhembe District.

In response to the need to protect the Baobabs, [Ecofluency](#) started a fundraising campaign for All Rise called the [Baobab tree fundraiser](#). We are so grateful that this campaign has raised awareness on behalf of these ancient trees and for the generous people who are donating to the work to protect them. Kirsten Youens, our chief executive director, was a guest speaker in January 2025, which is available to watch on YouTube: [Baobab Tree Talk with Kirsten Youens](#)

## More Links to various sources

- 19 March 2025-Carte Blanche, from media interest in the MMSEZ, conducted their own investigation on it. Find a link to a short clip of their exposé here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CW\\_CanP31Mk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CW_CanP31Mk)
- 14 January 2025- Business Day article by Toby chance, “Signs of progress at trade department, but trouble below the surface”: [TOBY CHANCE: Signs of progress at trade department, but trouble below the surface](#)
- 12 November 2024 interview with Lauren Liebenberg, Living Limpopo, on SAfm Night Talk with Oliver Dickson <https://omny.fm/shows/late-night-conversation/vhembe-biosphere-reserve-under-threat>

- 16 November 2024 interview with Kirsten Youens on SAfm Jet Set Breakfast with Michelle Constant titled, “Thirsty, energy-hungry steel ‘monster’ set to destroy thousands of Limpopo protected trees in industrial drive”  
<https://omny.fm/shows/the-jet-set-breakfast-1/thirsty-energy-hungry-steel-monster-set-to-destroy>
- 25 November 2024-Daily Maverick Opinion from Lauren Liebenberg called: [Old King Coal's pursuit of a marginal economic zone in Limpopo](#)
- 15 September 2023 interview with Kirsten Youens and Lauren Liebenberg on Just Us and the Climate titled, “The public versus the Musina-Makhado Special Economic Zone - Part 1”  
<https://iono.fm/e/1360705>

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