



Above: Photographed at the launch Vincent Christoforous, CEO of King Shaka Aviation and Dr Bandile Mkhize, CEO of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

HELICOPTER TRIAL FINDINGS

Since October 2011 until the beginning of February 2012, the helicopter undertook 105 sorties over the reserve, encountering more than 28 illegal vehicles inside the park as well as off-loading field rangers who encountered 10 armed people during this period. Further, the helicopter responded to 15 call-outs by Ezemvelo staff following tip-offs and signs of poaching activity.

Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Section Ranger at Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park (HiP) Lawrence Munroe, who was tasked with co-ordinating the logistics for the helicopter, said: "Based on these trails, the helicopter represents the single most sig-

nificant tool in the future battle against poaching. If King Shaka Aviation is able to expand this service throughout the province where rhinos are kept I think we will witness a turning point in this war against poachers," he said.

Munroe said it was not co-incidental that poaching in general at HiP had dropped significantly over the period the helicopter had been operational. He said last year South Africa had witnessed a 35% increase in rhino poaching, but KZN had shown a decrease: "We lost 14 rhino in HiP during 2010. This figure dropped to eight last year".

One of the most interesting developments that might account for the helicopter's success, he said, was that its

presence spread very quickly amongst surrounding communities.

"The chatter and queries surrounding its presence was continuous. People knew about and constantly wanted to know what it was doing."

