

MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MINISTER EDNA MOLEWA ADDRESSES THE NATIONAL PRESS CLUB ON THE ONGOING SCOURGE OF RHINO POACHING AND INTERVENTIONS AIMED AT ADDRESSING THIS PROBLEM

15 JANUARY 2012

I would like to express my dismay and strong condemnation of the ongoing scourge of rhino poaching in our country, which has seen the staggering number of 448 rhinos illegally killed in South Africa in 2011.

This ongoing poaching of our rhino population is a source for great concern to government and the various stakeholders. It requires of us all as a collective to take drastic measures to help combat it.

I would like to assure you that the government of South Africa views the illegal killing of this national treasure in a very serious light and will continue to prioritise our fight against this crime jointly with our law enforcement agencies. We will continue to implement the various initiatives highlighted last year, while putting in place added measures to address this matter.

We have established the National Biodiversity Investigators Forum specifically for multi-departmental co-operation and information sharing with various law enforcements. In addition to the Investigators Forum we have also established the interim National Wildlife Reaction Unit (NWCRU) that we would like to establish as a permanent unit. We have also seen the return of the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) to monitor the 350km of national border in Kruger National Park and other country borders.

Most of our rhino population is in the Kruger National Park which has faced an onslaught from poachers. We will deploy additional 150 Rangers to Kruger National Park this year, to add to the current 500, to address this crime.

As additional measure, the Department will implement a decision to deploy conservation specialists at key designated ports of entry and exit through which the international trade in endangered species (mainly CITES listed) can be exported and imported. The designations of the ports should also be extended to include all wildlife species imported and exported to and from South Africa under the National Environmental Management Act: Biodiversity Act (NEMBA).

This will include all indigenous species and those species listed as alien and those that are invasive. Such measures will facilitate effective regulatory enforcement by enabling wildlife and customs officers to conduct inspections and associated endorsement mechanisms in compliance with international obligations under CITES and with the NEMBA.

The Department of Environmental Affairs is also working towards ensuring that at least two facilities (one at a sea port and one at OR Tambo) are secured where wildlife officials at ports of entry and exit can inspect and examine wildlife consignments.

Operation Rhino still remains a standing agenda item of the National Joints Committee (Nat Joints Com), which comprises of senior members of SAPS, NPA and the South African National Defence Force. This committee is responsible for coordination, joint planning and implementation of high priority security measures. As a result of this cooperation, 232 people were arrested in 2011 alone for rhino poaching and related activities.

Our efforts at the international level have been intensified. We have to date formally and on numerous occasions engaged our counterparts in the Peoples Republic of China and the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. We managed within this short space of time to prepare the draft Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs)s on wildlife trafficking and enforcement which we hope to sign during the first half of this year - 2012. Both these countries have pledged their commitment to partner with us in addressing this scourge.

With regards to the Bilateral on Safety and Security between South Africa and Mozambique, at officials' level a discussion on cross-border law enforcement took place. We will escalate this to the level of Ministers. We will cooperate with SAPS in finalizing a strategy on cross-border law enforcement involving wildlife issues.

The Department has also played an active role and contributed to international meetings and forums including INTERPOL Wildlife Crime meetings, Rhinoceros Task Force of CITES, regional Rhino and Elephant Security Group and Rhino Management Group.

You may be aware that in mid-November last year the People's Republic of China seized 33 rhino horns, 758 ivory chopsticks and 127 ivory bracelets worth R18, 17 million in Hong Kong. We are currently finalising the due process in collaboration with the judiciary in Hong Kong that will allow us to take samples

of the DNA. That will enable the determination of the actual origin of the seized rhino horns and contribute to evidence in court proceedings which will ensue.

On the 30 September 2011, I published for public comment, the proposed amendments to the norms and standards for the marking of rhinoceros horn and hunting of white rhinoceros for trophy hunting. Interested and affected parties were given 30 days to submit their comments or inputs.

My Department evaluated the comments that were received during the comment period and duly effected amendments that will be scrutinised by the relevant cooperative governance structures. Once the consultative process is finalised, I will consider and publish the final amendments for implementation.

These proposed amendments will strengthen provisions relating to marking of horns and or live rhino specimens, the supervision of hunts, the transport of the horn subsequent to the hunt, reporting and monitoring, verification of hunters, and the provisions relating to the taking of samples for DNA profiling.

The Dehorning impact study which was completed did assist in determining whether Dehorning is a viable intervention to address the risks relating to poaching. The study indentified the need to urgently conduct further research, with cooperation of private rhino owners, to gain empirical data on the efficacy of rhino dehorning as a means of reducing poaching threat, and on potential impacts on social behaviour and reproductive output. Similarly, research is required to better understand poacher behaviour and the drivers thereof to identify the extent to which dehorning is likely to act as a meaningful deterrent.

Some of the key findings of the study include the following:

- The decision of whether to dehorn a rhino population or not depends on a number of factors, including the level of the poaching threat, the level of security in place, the availability of funds and the size, location and distribution of the rhino population in question.
- Due to the invasive nature of, and expense associated with dehorning, the intervention should only be considered under conditions of relatively severe poaching threat.
- Dehorning should only be considered where a baseline level of security is in place, otherwise rhinos are highly likely to be poached, regardless of their horn status.

- Where there is no realistic expectation of implementing adequate security in a reasonable time frame to protect vulnerable populations, translocating rhinos to more secure locations is preferable to dehorning.
- If dehorning is to be undertaken, an attempt should be made to dehorn the entire adult population in small populations, although the practicality of total dehorning will depend on various factors including terrain, habitat and rhino density.
- All dehorning should be done in as short a time as possible to minimize potential behavioural impacts associated with having some individual rhinos horned and others without horns, although such impacts are not necessarily significant.
- In larger reserves/populations, dehorning can be practiced strategically to reduce the vulnerability of highly visible individual rhinos along boundaries, fence lines and roads.
- The ideal frequency of re-dehorning will depend on the level of threat: under conditions of severe threat, rhinos should be re-dehorned every 12-24 months, under conditions of intermediate threat 24-36 months should suffice
- Dehorning is likely to be most effective if practiced by all, or a significant proportion of the rhino owners / reserves in a given area.
- All dehorning should be accompanied by publicity drives to ensure that poachers are well aware that the reserve in question is 'horn-free', to prevent a lag effect whereby poachers continue to target the area in the belief that the rhinos there are horned.
- Where sufficient funds are available for top quality security, dehorning may not be necessary.

In essence, ladies and gentlemen, the dehorning impact study reveals that dehorning cannot be considered as the only security intervention. The decisions to dehorn a rhino population or not will therefore depend on a number of factors, including:

- the level of the poaching threat,
- the level of security in place,
- the availability of funds and
- the size, location and distribution of the rhino population in question.

The feasibility study to determine the viability of legalising trade in rhino horn within South Africa, that relates to the national moratorium currently in place, has been initiated and it is anticipated that the study will be concluded by August 2012.

The following issues will be addressed in that study:

- Trends in local (national) trade in rhino horn prior to the February 2009 moratorium.
- Trends in the incidences of poaching and trophy hunting of rhinos prior to- and subsequent to the national moratorium, and relative to changes in laws pertaining to trophy hunting.
- The scale and scope of the potential market for rhino horn in South Africa.
- The implications of lifting the national moratorium on rhino trade in South Africa, including risks.

The Global market research study relating to rhino horn was advertised. Unfortunately, a suitable service provider was not found and the Department will consider alternatives to ensure that the study is initiated as soon as possible.

The main aim of the study is to investigate the current markets (illegal markets) and to determine the drivers and trends associated with these markets. The information will assist in focusing interventions in terms of enforcement in “consumer” states and will identify the areas requiring further cooperation and collaboration between South Africa and these countries.

With regard to the proposed moratorium on hunting, I have consulted with my provincial colleagues regarding the matter and decided not to effect a blanket moratorium at this moment. We have however agreed that I should reserve the right to implement any such or associated measures in targeted areas, environments and or provinces where such will be necessary. My department will pursue a halt to the issuance of hunting permits to hunters coming from countries that do not have appropriate legislation to monitor whether the trophy is used for the purpose as reflected on the permits.

It is clear that we need to continue working with all stakeholders and our entire South African society, if this war on rhino poaching is to be won. It is clear that this is an organised crime. And in dealing with organised criminals we need inputs and action from all South Africans including yourselves as members of the media.

South Africans are also urged to report any illegal rhino activities that they are aware of to 0800 205 005.

I thank you!

For media queries contact Albi Modise: 083 490 2871