

## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

### **MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MRS EDNA MOLEWA, HIGHLIGHTS PROGRESS IN THE WAR AGAINST POACHING**

10 May 2015

Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset I would like to thank you for being with us at this briefing, on a Sunday of Mothers' Day. We would have liked to hold this briefing earlier than today but the huge program of work that we have to deal with have been unstable and unpredictable.

We, as the Department of Environmental Affairs, remain committed to providing accurate, timely account in relation to this very important topic: the conservation of the iconic African rhino.

We recognize and note the vital role that the people of this country and media whom we often speak through, have to play; not just in awareness of our people but also to the conservation of the rhino. We also continue to recognize the importance of mobilizing public support for our efforts and campaigns to fight rhino poaching, as led by the government. We also remind you that the fight against rhino poaching is a fight to be waged by all of us.

This government will not win this battle alone, but through real tangible efforts by all of us.

Since we announced the implementation of our Integrated Strategic Management Approach of Rhinoceros last year, I have also consistently urged members of the media towards responsible reporting on the issue of rhino poaching as well as on conservation efforts.

We all have a duty as South Africans to ensure that information that we release into the public domain does not ultimately serve the exact opposite of the purpose for which it was intended: thereby giving fodder to the organized criminal syndicates involved in the illegal wildlife trade.

We should be aware that these criminals, like all members of the public, are also consumers of the information we release. Excessive speculation on the fetching price of rhino horn, identifying so-called poaching hotspots, and specifics on rhino translocations in the media does influence the habits and tactics of the syndicates. Add to this the in-detail publication of anti-poaching tactics being employed by the multidisciplinary teams involved in this fight.

So whilst we as the Department of Environmental Affairs will continue to provide regular updates; from your side we once again urge responsible reporting.

We are committed to providing South Africans with relevant information, in support of active, informed and patriotic citizenship. The fact that we have here with us today, the representatives from the South African Police Service (SAPS), led by Police Commissioner, General Riah Phiyega to share this information with South Africans through all of you, is indicative of our commitment.

A special thanks to Commissioner Phiyega for making the time to be with us here today: the SAPS play a vital role in helping to combat rhino poaching.

As you are aware, Cabinet approved the Integrated Strategic Management of Rhinoceros in South Africa in August 2014.

The key aspects of this program include the following:

- Managing rhino populations

- Compulsory interventions (proactive anti-poaching measures)
- International and national collaboration and cooperation
- long-term sustainability measures

In line with our government's commitment to transparency and accountability, on the 22nd January this year we reported to South Africans on the significant progress that had been made with regards to the implementation of the interventions thus far.

In March this year we also briefed the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Environmental Affairs on progress with regards to the implementation of the Integrated Strategic Management approach.

As agreed by Cabinet, we continued to work together as different role-players consisting of Environmental Affairs, the South African Police Service, the National Prosecuting Authority, South African National Defence Force, State Security Agency (SSA), Home Affairs, Transport, Finance, International Relations, Rural Development and Land Reform, Justice and Correctional Services, Social Development, Communications, Provinces, as well as private sector, NGOs and Academic Institutions – in the implementation of the Integrated Strategic Management approach. Let us remember that this Integrated Strategic Management Approach also covers our partnerships with at international level with SADC region, African continent and beyond the continent.

## **MANAGING RHINO POPULATIONS**

### **1. BIODIVERSITY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR WHITE RHINO**

***The Biodiversity Management Plan for White Rhinoceros was gazetted at the end of March 2015.***

The aim of a Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) is to ensure the long-term survival in nature of the species (and any sub-specific taxa) to which the plan relates. They enable the evaluation of conservation progress and management. The BMP also sets out key actions and strategies needed to ensure that monitoring, protection, conservation and sustainable management of the species will contribute to meeting conservation goals and contribute towards meeting the long-term vision for conservation of the species in question.

The short-term or five-year target sets a “realistic goal” of a meta-populations of at least 20 400 white rhino in South Africa by 2020.

The BMP forms part of a dynamic and continuing management planning process and allows for review and monitoring of actions to accommodate changing priorities and emerging issues.

On the matter of rhino numbers, I am today also able to present the findings of the latest survey of rhino conducted in the Kruger National Park, where most of our rhino live.

During September 2014 SANParks conducted a survey on rhino in the Kruger National Park – where 96% of white rhino and nearly all black rhino are found.

Extrapolating the 2014 southern Kruger survey to the whole of the Park we can report an estimated population of 8 001 to 9 290 white rhino across the whole of the Kruger National Park, which is slightly lower than the 8 400 to 9 600 estimated during the 2013 survey. (This survey will still be discussed by our Scientists as part of a peer review process)

The good news however is that this decline is not equally spread across the KNP, for example in the IPZ we have seen a 3% increase in the population. This implies that the IPZ approach is starting to bear fruits and have positive consequences for rhino. The others parts of KNP will require complimentary approaches similar to the fight we waged in the IPZs in order to achieve similar successes.

## **2. TRANSLOCATION UPDATE**

In 2014 we announced that rhino would be translocated from areas where they are under threat; to Intensive Protection Zones (IPZ's) as well as to other more secure areas in South Africa and to neighbouring States.

An IPZ is an area where an additional deployment of resources and technology provides a more secure environment for the rhino.

Our ability to move these rhino is determined by amongst others seasonal factors. It should be borne in mind that translocation of rhino can ideally happen during cooler seasons of the year. As reported in January 2015 a total of 192 rhino were translocated to different locations nationally and internationally.

We are pleased to report that the animals have generally integrated well with the resident populations in the areas to which they have been moved.

## **3. RHINO SALES UPDATE**

In January 2015 we reported that the SANParks tender process for the purchase of white rhino from the KNP had just commenced. The sales process was initiated in October 2014 with a call for bids placed in the national media. The process is now at an advanced stage and soon we will be adding to the number of rhino that are to be translocated to safer places.

It is anticipated that in excess of 200 white rhino will be sold to private buyers as an outcome of this process.

Furthermore, proceeds from the sale of rhino will be allocated to a ring-fenced fund that will be ploughed into conservation programmes.

## **4. INJURED AND ORPHANED RHINOS**

Also as part of managing rhino populations, it is important to consider the plight of injured and orphaned rhino. SANParks has entered a partnership with the Peace Parks Foundation (PPF) and other Non-Governmental Organisations to treat rhino injured and orphaned as a result of poaching.

In the course of 2014 SANParks rescued 16 rhino orphans, of which 12 were taken to specialist care and 4 were placed with surrogate mothers in holding bomas managed by SANParks.

The ultimate aim is for the orphans to be integrated back into a normally functioning breeding population. Once they have recovered and are grazing, and have been integrated with older rhino, they will be moved to rhino strongholds where they will form part of the breeding population.

We appreciate funding from the Dutch and Swedish postcode lotteries, as well as additional donors. Through these funds we are implementing this Rhino Rescue Programme in collaboration between DEA, SANParks, Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and Peace Parks Foundation.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the media,

## **ANTI-POACHING COMPULSORY INTREVENTIONS**

The stepping up of our efforts has included traditional anti-poaching policing strategies, as well as innovative new methods, including the use of technology – a point I will address shortly.

As I announced in January, there has been increased collaboration between provincial, national and international law-enforcement authorities, as well as in our own criminal justice system and prosecution service.

## **COMPULSORY INTERVENTIONS**

### **1. PROACTIVE ANTI-POACHING MEASURES AND THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY**

Although the Commissioner will speak to these in greater detail, I will briefly outline our progress thus far.

As reported in January 2015, the Mission Area Joint Operations Centre in the Kruger National Park is now fully functional. We have recorded a number of successes as our strategies to disrupt criminal syndicates slowly but surely bear fruit.

Be that as it may, by the end of April 2015 the number of rhino we lost to poachers was 393 for the whole country. Of these, 290 were poached in the KNP. By last year this time the number of rhino lost to poachers were 331 for the whole of the country and 212 for the KNP.

Regarding arrests, as at the end of April last year, a total of 96 people had been arrested for poaching. By the end of April this year, a total of 132 people were arrested for rhino-poaching related activities. Of these 62 were arrested in KNP as at the end of April 2015.

Based on the above figures, it is clear that losses continue to increase in the KNP, while the rest of the country shows either a decrease or stabilisation compared to last year's pattern. What is encouraging though is the increase in the number of arrests we have recorded this year.

To assist in the fight against poaching, our Security Forces working with SANParks have upped their technological game.

We received an initial grant funding of R254.8 million in 2014 to support anti-poaching operations in the Kruger National Park. This incorporated the establishment of 'Air Mobility' capacity' and included the purchase of a first helicopter through the grant funding in September 2014.

Subsequent to the initial grant funding, the Howard G Buffet Foundation granted SANParks an additional R37.7 million to purchase a second Airbus AS350 B3e helicopter to further increase the capacity of flight operations in the KNP.

In March this year SANParks received this second new Airbus AS-350B3e helicopter with night flying capability. It has subsequently been commissioned and has been assisting in the fight against poaching.

In addition to increasing current flight crew capability of flying at night, the helicopter is expected to improve response time in dealing with contacts and other incidents in the Park. Just recently, the helicopter assisted in a dramatic pre-dusk swoop inside the KNP that netted four suspected poachers as well as a range of poaching equipment.

The improved aerial support to the rangers of the ground, and the increasing capacity of the canine unit have assisted in improving the effectiveness of the anti-poaching operations in the Kruger National Park, with 28 arrests having been effected in the month of April of this year.

The SANDF, SANParks and the CSIR are piloting and evaluating Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV's) as instruments in rhino protection efforts under a range of operational conditions. This is subject to finalisation of arrangements with the Department of Transport.

The testing of UAV technology in the KNP is but one component of a suite of anti-poaching initiatives supported by the Rhino Protection Programme (RPP). The RPP is a collaborative effort between the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), South African National Parks (SANParks), Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (Ezemvelo), and Peace Parks Foundation (PPF).

To further bolster the abilities of our rangers to conduct their work, field rangers and law-enforcement personnel have undergone rapid skills assessment to determine their current skill levels and training requirements by the Southern African Wildlife College and the Kruger National Park. Further training in this regard is continuing.

## **2. GEF-UNEP RHINO PROGRAMME**

In January we announced that there has been progress made with regards to the implementation of the project agreed to between the Department and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) funded by the Global Environmental Facility (GEF). This includes information and analysis, cooperation on training, and the use of forensic technology.

The UNEP-GEF Rhino Program is progressing on an accelerated schedule. The four 4x4 Forensic Trailers delivered to the DEA will be handed over to the provinces during the course of this month. .

In January 2015 we announced that advanced crime scene management training had been scheduled. The first of the three crime-scene filming sessions has been completed. These will serve as visual supplementary training material for rhino crime scene investigators with two more scheduled for this year.

We also announced that we were engaging with the South African Judicial Awareness Institute to lay the groundwork for the training of Magistrates. A Magistrate Awareness Symposium has been scheduled for August this year, with the Prosecutor Training Conference also scheduled to take place in November 2015.

These sessions were due to take place over the four year period of the UNEP-GEF programme. Given the immediate need to reach as many of these stakeholders in the current year, a decision has been taken to consolidate these into two larger events this year.

## **3. PORTS OF ENTRY AND EXIT**

As announced in January 2015, the DEA Green Scorpions are now in operation at the Oliver Tambo International Airport (ORTIA) working closely with other law enforcement agencies and Departments.

Our team is there to make sure that non-compliance with regulations and CITES trade bans are enforced. Since then our team of Compliance officials have been working at the airport to ensure that CITES export and re-export permits are endorsed after physical inspection of consignments and that CITES import permits are cancelled after use.

Trade bans for commercial purposes relating to CITES listed species have been put in place since 19 March 2015 for Lao People's Democratic Republic and Nigeria due to non-compliance with CITES obligations and the Green Scorpions need to ensure that these bans are enforced.

We have already scored a significant victory. A consignment for export destined for the Lao People's Democratic Republic was stopped at ORTIA on 9 April 2015. The consignment was stopped and the CITES Export permit cancelled.

Operation COBRA III: An initiative in support of the Lusaka Agreement Task Force (LATF) and ASEAN Wildlife Enforcement Network (WEN) under the broader INTERPOL CONNEXUS Initiative. COBRA III aims to prevent, detect, suppress and apprehend criminals and disrupt criminal networks that exploit elephants, pangolins, rhinoceros, big cats, and other wildlife species which are exploited illegally.

The South African initiative for COBRA III will focus on increasing force levels to prioritise and execute operational initiatives to fight among others, poaching, smuggling and trafficking of wildlife to gather information, detect, apprehend and prosecute offenders.

## **NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COLLABORATION AND COOPERATION**

We have long affirmed that we cannot win this battle alone. We rely on collaboration and cooperation with international bodies as well as range states to support us in neutralizing the threat of organized transnational criminal syndicates involved in the illegal wildlife trade.

As part of our international engagements, we attended and participated in The Kasane Conference on Illegal Wildlife Trade in Botswana. The Kasane Statement was adopted by the meeting, and included actions to address four (4) critical areas:

- Eradicating the market for illegal wildlife products
- Ensuring effective legal frameworks and deterrents
- Strengthening law enforcement
- Sustainable livelihoods and economic development

The recent African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN) at its meeting held in March 2015 in Cairo, Egypt adopted a decision to support the development of the African Common Strategy on Combatting Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora. South Africa is part of the Committee responsible for the drafting of this Strategy that was initiated in Congo-Brazzaville late last month.

## **MEMORANDA OF UNDERSTANDING**

### **Vietnam:**

Significant progress has been made since the last official visit to Vietnam, in September 2014. As part of our collaboration, South Africa provided Vietnamese authorities with forensic kits to facilitate the collection of DNA samples from confiscated rhino horns.

We expect to receive a Vietnamese team in South Africa during May to hand over DNA samples of rhino horn.

As part of awareness and demand management programmes, we will be hosting a group of 22 Vietnamese youth and 4 teachers in June and July 2015 – where they will be exposed to issues related to rhino conservation and will take this message to audiences back home.

### **Mozambique:**

On the 30<sup>th</sup> March 2015 we had an opportunity to meet with my Mozambican counterpart Minister Correia and his team and witnessed progress made on the following –

- Resettlement of 3 of the 7 villages that used to be in the Greater Limpopo Transfrontier Park;
- A community near Sabi Game Reserve whose quality of life has improved through a partnership between Government and a Private Game Reserve.
- The pass-out parade of the new Mozambican Environment Police

**We further agreed to ensure that the following areas are addressed;**

- Capacity building for the anti-poaching operations and control of illegal trafficking;
- The strengthening of the institutional framework for CITES ;
- Implementation of decisions of the Joint Permanent Commission on Defence and Security
- The introduction of new technologies for combating illegal killing of rhino and trafficking;
- Extend collaboration with China and Vietnam;
- Finalisation of legal processes and signing of our Implementation plan
- Joint reporting on CITES and to the SADC meeting of Ministers
- Establishment of a Joint Technical team comprising of the SAPS, SADNF, SANParks, and DEA and the Mozambican counterparts.
- Authorisation of Joint operations by Field Rangers into each other's territory when following a poacher. Standard Operating Procedure will be developed in this regard.
- South Africa and Mozambique will jointly submit a comprehensive report to the CITES Secretariat, by 1 July 2015, on progress relating to deliverables agreed between Ministers at the June 2013 meeting, and
- The two countries also highlighted the need to escalate projects that promote the creation of alternative economic opportunities and sustainable economies. This includes securing joint funding to support the creation of natural resource-based SMME's in communities affected by wildlife crime
- Joint awareness programmes in both countries

Among the key decisions taken from this engagement are issues relating to the signing of the Implementation Plan – that this be speeded up; policy harmonisation in the wildlife crime spectrum between the two countries; and that the joint command systems between both countries to commence as soon as possible. Of utmost importance is the creation of alternative economic choices for affected communities in South Africa and In Mozambique.

Our technical teams will be meeting before the end of this month to look at an action specific plan to implement these decisions.

**China:**

On 23 March, we signed a Wildlife Conservation Implementation Plan with the Vice Administrator of the State Forestry Administration of the People's Republic of China, Mr Sun Zhagen. The Implementation Plan promotes cooperation between the Parties in the fields of law enforcement, compliance with

CITES, technology transfer and other relevant legislation and Conventions on the basis of equality and mutual benefit.

It also outlines mechanisms for the sharing of information, technology utilization and exchange of ideas on demand reduction and cooperation. This includes exchanging information on hunters and wildlife private sector role-players.

## **OTHER INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENTS**

Further MOU's are expected to be signed with Cambodia on the 29<sup>th</sup> May this year if all goes well logistically, while Memoranda of Understanding are also to be concluded with rhino range States, namely Botswana, Tanzania and Kenya.

At an international level, we initiated and attended the CITES Ministerial Dialogue for Key States concerned with the Illegal Trade in Rhinoceros Horn in Geneva, Switzerland, on 13 February 2015. The parties agreed to implement specific security and enforcement-related priorities for short and medium term actions supported by the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC).

At this meeting, South African law-enforcement authorities were recognised by the CITES for their work as part of "Operation Whisper", a multi-faceted operation resulted in a significant number of arrests of suspects involved in the illegal killing of rhino in KwaZulu-Natal, as well as the trafficking of rhino horn between Kwa-Zulu Natal and Gauteng.

## **LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES**

The Integrated Strategic Management Approach for Rhino is precisely that: an integrated plan that involves multi-sectoral actors cooperating to find a range of solutions to the problem we face.

We are currently faced with a situation where gradually our Rangers are doing more of anti-poaching in a militaristic way whereas they are supposed to be focussing on the conservation mandate. This is not sustainable over a long term.

It is our conviction that working together with our communities will result in sustainable solutions.

## **LONG-TERM SUSTAINABILITY MEASURES – COMMUNITIES**

As we have always stated that we need to include communities in all our initiatives. By providing alternative incentives, we will continue to encourage them to recognize the value of rhino. It is for this reason that we will continue to implement our People and Parks Programme in collaboration with Department of Rural Development and Land Reform.

We have realized that one of the best way to ensure real, tangible benefit sharing in conservation is the sustainable utilization opportunities for communities supported through infrastructure development, job creation, and enterprise and skills development.

We have invested an amount of up to three billion rand, over a three-year period, in community projects, primarily through our People and Parks programme. For this year, R796 million has been budgeted for People and Parks, with an additional R 106 million to facilitate community ownership of land designated for conservation.

We anticipate that we will undertake projects that will assist to uplift the financial and economic status of our people through management of natural resources and subsequent creation of sustainable livelihoods.

Not only this, but we need to partner with communities to instil in them the need for conservation of rhino.

Today I am pleased to report back on the successful Rhino Ambassadors Programme which has been implemented around Hluhluwe iMfolozi and Sabie Sands.

This is being run as part of the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife Community Conservation programme – aimed at creating partnerships with communities, thus ensuring sustainable use of resources but at the same time fostering biodiversity conservation value.

The Rhino Ambassador programme, currently in its second year of operation – now comprises 399 community members employed around Hluhluwe uMfolozi Park, Tembe Elephant Park, Ndumo Game Reserve and Weenen Game Reserve. The programme is funded by the Department of Environmental Affairs and the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) together with SANParks as the implementing agent.

**Among the work of the Rhino Ambassadors is:**

- To create awareness amongst community members about the plight of the rhino, the issue of rhino poaching and to encourage the community to fight against this crime.
- To develop a good relationship between Ezemvelo and the communities through informing the communities about the work that Ezemvelo does for the community through biodiversity conservation

The Rhino Ambassadors have reported that the attitude of the public towards their message has changed over the course of the project. They are now perceived to be an authority on conservation within the community.

**CONCLUSION**

We know, Ladies and Gentlemen of the media, that one rhino poached is one too many. But we are confident that had it not been for the comprehensive measures we introduced last year as part of the Integrated Strategic Management Approach, the figures could be higher.

The reality is that given the magnitude of the problem, as well the fact that rhino poaching is inextricably linked to organized transnational crime – it will require an escalation of our efforts to achieve our objective. Together with our colleagues in the law-enforcement sector and prosecution service: we are doing our utmost to disrupt these syndicates wherever we find them.

With the help of all South Africans, the NGO community, Private Sector, as well as the Media, we remain committed to the conservation of the rhino.

I thank you!

**For media queries, contact**

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**ISSUED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**