

MEDIA STATEMENT

MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, DR EDNA MOLEWA, HIGHLIGHTS PROGRESS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INTEGRATED STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF RHINOCEROS

25 JANUARY 2018

Fellow South Africans,

Ladies and gentlemen of the media,

Welcome to the first report back for 2018 on the Integrated Strategic Management approach to combat rhino poaching.

I want to welcome my colleagues and thank them for taking the time to be here with us this morning, enabling us to address you as a collective.

Next to me here is the Minister of State Security Mr. Bongani Bongo – and joining us via videolink from Cape Town is the Minister of Defence and Military Veterans Ms. Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula.

As you will know, rhino poaching is a national priority crime; and Department of Environmental Affairs continues to follow a multi-disciplinary approach together with our colleagues in the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster Departments and agencies, namely, the Departments of Defence, Justice and Constitutional Development, Correctional Services, the Ministry of State Security, the Directorate of Priority Crime Investigation or Hawks and the South African Police Service (SAPS).

South African National Parks (SANParks), the South African Revenue Service (SARS), the Asset Forfeiture Unit and National Prosecuting Authority and all our provincial conservation authorities also continue to provide the necessary support required in this endeavour.

We remain committed to providing timely and comprehensive reports on the state of rhino poaching in South Africa. Today's briefing will cover the remaining part of the 2017 period and provide an overview of the whole of 2017, since we have done the previous quarterly reports of 2017.

You will note that there has been progress in a number of areas, including arrests, investigations and successful convictions of rhino poachers and smugglers, as well as the stepping up of technological and other interventions within our joint operations.

Our implementation plan for the Integrated Strategic Management of Rhinoceros is guided by the relevant Cabinet Decisions and the outcomes of the Rhino Conservation Lab held in 2016 under the auspices of the Biodiversity element of Operation Phakisa.

Today's report back will cover the following thematic areas in line with the Integrated Strategic Management Approach, namely compulsory interventions, managing rhino populations, long-term sustainability interventions and new interventions – all of these within the context of national and international cooperation.

1. Compulsory Interventions

Intensive Protection Zone (IPZ)

The Intensive Protection Zone approach allows us to allocate limited resources to ensure maximum protection in areas of greatest importance.

In our last briefing we reported that an IPZ had been established in key reserves in KwaZulu-Natal province and that we were investigating rolling it out in other provinces. I am pleased to report that an IPZ has since been established in the Eastern Cape.

Patrol Optimisation

We have initiated a patrol optimisation programme in our Parks. This is the intelligence-driven allocation of patrol resources into high risk poaching areas.

The Patrol Optimization Program which began in the Balule Game Reserve with the all-female Black Mamba anti-poaching unit in 2016, has since been successfully expanded into six other rhino reserves. As indicated above, a strategic partner in our anti-poaching team is the South African National Defence Force who are crucial in assisting with border integrity and providing support to the SAPS and our rangers. These joint operations are coordinated in the Mission Area Joint Operations Centre.

Game-changing technological interventions

The use of game-changing technological interventions remain key in the fight against poaching. The new technology system that we are using now is at the cutting edge of integrating real-time technology, intelligence, situational awareness and analysis and is operational in the Kruger National Park (KNP). This tool assists rangers, protected areas managers, investigators and law enforcement agencies and government organisations to combat wildlife crime more effectively. It has been proven to be an extremely effective tool. We are rolling it out to the rest of the country.

Operation Rhino

We have seen the successes of Operations Rhino (1 to 7) which are essentially coordinated anti-poaching operations that involve all the relevant security agencies referred to above and we are continuing with the implementation of Operation Rhino 8, centralised in the MAJOC in the KNP. Of significance in this regard is the marked increase in the number of convictions related to rhino poaching within the mission area from 58 in 2016 to 111 in 2017.

Threat and Risk Assessments

We have noted the vulnerabilities in certain provinces and continue to undertake Threat and Risk Assessments that provide a basis for decision-making in mitigating and adapting to identified threats. Our efforts have been stepped up in other provinces with the introduction of technology interventions in these provinces and the identification of intensive protection zones.

1.1 Arrests, investigations and prosecutions

Our security-related anti-poaching efforts are being led by the SAPS, DEA, SANDF, DOJCD, SARS, the Financial Intelligence Centre (FIC) and the State Security Agency (SSA).

Recognition is therefore given to our law enforcement agencies under the command of the SAPS, within the extended Mission Area Joint Operations Centre (MAJOC) for their continued commitment to these anti-poaching efforts.

Arrests:

In the reporting period, a total of 502 alleged rhino poachers and 16 alleged traffickers were arrested nationally bringing the total figure to 518. This represents a decrease from 2016 when a total of 680 poachers and traffickers were arrested.

For the Kruger National Park, the number of arrests of alleged poachers stood at 446 in 2017 – this comprises 189 arrested inside the KNP, and 257 adjacent to the Park. This represents an increase compared to 2016 when a total of 417 were arrested inside and adjacent to the KNP.

A total of 220 weapons were seized in rhino-related incidents both inside and outside the KNP in 2017.

Ladies and Gentlemen, it would be important for us to mention that there has been arrests made for poaching-related offences from amongst our own personnel. Regrettably, during 2017, 21 officials were arrested in this regard.

In line with the national government's commitment to root out corruption, SANParks has instituted a programme of integrity testing throughout the organisation, to support our ongoing anti-poaching efforts.

Investigations and Prosecutions

With regards to ensuring that all cases involving poaching make it to trial and are successfully prosecuted, the work of the National Prosecuting Authority is of paramount importance.

The Directorate for Priority Crime Investigations (DPCI), also known as the Hawks, working in close cooperation with other government departments, has done sterling work since January 2017.

The Hawks have determined that there are a number of new trends linked to rhino poaching in South Africa. Smugglers are coming up with new ways and methods to process horn and smuggle it out of the country.

This has also been observed in Mozambique and the Hawks are currently communicating with national and transnational law enforcement agencies on the new trends of trafficking rhino horns.

Despite these trends our law enforcement authorities continue to step up their detection activities. As a result, we are now seeing an increase in the number of arrests of higher level syndicate members.

Between 1 April 2017 and 31 December 2017, the Hawks arrested 16 level three to four (courier/local buyers and exporters) wildlife traffickers of South-East Asian, South African, Mozambican, Zimbabwean and Kenyan origin – and confiscated 168,46kg of rhino horn. Given the complexities of these syndicates we regard this figure as a significant achievement.

These cases were linked to rhino poaching incidents in KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo and the arrests were further linked to incidences in Swaziland and Mozambique. Ten of these cases involved end-users from Asia.

I would like to highlight a particular case involving a consignment of horns seized at OR Tambo International Airport in February 2017 *en route* to Hong Kong via Swaziland. It will be published in the INTERPOL Journal as a case study on best practice in the coordination of investigations.

Two Taiwanese rhino horn traffickers were arrested by the Royal Swaziland Police and a total of 34,96 kilograms of rhino horns were seized between the two countries. The horns are linked to a rhino poaching incident at Balule Game Reserve, Hoedspruit in January 2017, as well as rhino poaching incidents in the North West Province and KZN. The Hawks testified in this matter during the bail application in Swaziland and were successful in opposing the bail application. They also assisted with further investigation and supported the trial.

The two Taiwanese nationals were sentenced to 29 years imprisonment plus compensation. This means that over and above the sentences imposed, the accused were ordered to either replace the rhinos poached in South Africa or to compensate the owners of the animals to the full gazetted value in respect of each of the 3 rhinos.

The men were further ordered to replace or compensate the Government of Swaziland for a fourth rhino. The judge ordered that failure to replace the rhinos or pay the stipulated compensation shall over and above the penalties imposed result in 4 years additional imprisonment.

The coordinated efforts between DPCI, the South African Revenue Service (SARS) Customs and Excise, supported by the Environmental Management Inspectors (EMI's) have resulted in the dismantling of 35 trafficking networks linking the transit countries of Swaziland, Mozambique, Namibia and Kenya to the end-user countries in Asia.

Cases underway and finalised against international rhino horn traffickers include:

- Zhang Desheng – arrested for possession of 10 rhino horn on 18 August 2016. He was convicted and sentenced to a fine of R1 million or eight years' imprisonment, of which half was suspended, on 22 May 2017.
- Ye Zhiwei – arrested for possession of 18 rhino horn on 23 November 2016. He was convicted and sentenced on 19 April 2017 to a fine of R1.2 million or six years' imprisonment.
- Le Xuan Binh - was arrested for possession of five rhino horn from animals poached in KZN and the KNP on 20 June 2017. He pleaded guilty and was sentenced on 4 November 2017 to a R1 million fine or four years imprisonment, and an additional four years imprisonment suspended for five years.

- Vua Sun and Bo Yong – arrested for possession of 10 rhino horn on 11 June 2017. The two traffickers pleaded guilty and were each sentenced to seven years imprisonment without the option of a fine.
- Xue Shuangshuang – arrested for possession of 11 rhino horn on 25 July 2017. He was sentenced to four years imprisonment without the option of a fine.
- Jaqueline Similo Nkomo – arrested for possession of two rhino horn in 2017. She is scheduled to be sentenced on 6 March 2018.

1.2 Ports of Entry and Exit

Ports of Entry and Exit

With regards to the detection of horn at ports of entry and exit, our Environmental Management Inspectors (EMI's) or Green Scorpions continue with their work at OR Tambo International Airport and assist among others the SARS and SAPS with cases where illegally traded rhino horn have been detected.

During 2017 there were 8 seizures of rhino horn at OR Tambo International Airport.

Our first case at ORTIA of 2018 involved the arrest of a South-East Asian national in early January hiding 3 rhino horn pieces of approximately 4kg in a wine box.

The woman has been charged with illegal possession of rhino horn and exporting without a CITES permit. She has been granted bail of R150 000 and the case has been postponed to mid-February 2018.

The Green Scorpions also play an important role in court proceedings where they regularly testify in aggravation of sentence in Rhino related cases. This is occurring with increased frequency particularly with regards to the cases involving rhino horn trafficking through OR Tambo International Airport. With respect to these cases we are now seeing lengthy sentences being handed down in cases of horns smuggled from and through South Africa en route to another country.

South Africa furthermore continues to formally request DNA samples from illegally traded horn confiscated abroad. It is now common practice that when we are informed of the seizure of horns in another country we reach out to the local authorities and request a DNA sample. So far, linkages to poaching events are being positively identified from seizures in Thailand, Vietnam, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Swaziland, Namibia, Mozambique and the Netherlands.

Awareness-Raising

With regards to training personnel on detection of illicit trans-boundary movement of wildlife and wildlife products; the Advanced Grade 5 EMI training program was completed at the end of October 2017 with 1 273 rangers successfully completing the program. This was made possible through donor funding.

I am pleased to announce that during 2017, for the first time, the Department of Environmental Affairs commenced with an awareness raising exercise for members of the SANDF on the illicit trans-boundary movement of wildlife and wildlife products. This initiative will be further rolled out in 2018 in the borderline provinces of KwaZulu/Natal, Free State, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and North West.

This is part of our continued efforts to build capacity to tackle the illegal wildlife trade along our borders.

2. Managing Rhino Populations

2.1 Translocation

Ladies and Gentlemen, translocation of rhino has been an effective tool in enhancing the safety of our animals, encouraging population growth and expanding rhino range. To this effect, SANParks continues to translocate rhino away from high risk poaching areas.

Following a request to the South African government by the Government of Chad, a team of South African experts visited Chad to conduct due diligence.

They assessed habitat, security and management suitability and associated ecological parameters as well as infrastructural readiness prior to the translocation of black rhinos.

Now that the necessary logistical arrangements are in place, we are pleased to announce the planned translocation of a small group of black rhino to the Zakouma National Park in Chad later this year.

This is in terms of the MOU signed between South Africa and Chad in October 2017 and the African Rhino Range States Conservation Plan signed in October 2016 encourages, amongst other things, regional cooperation in rhino conservation.

It should be noted that Chad has excelled in its anti-poaching activities and has only lost two elephant to poachers since 2010.

This translocation will serve as an example of cooperation between DEA and SANParks, the Government of Chad and African Parks, which manages national parks in that country.

2.2 Biological Management

Initiatives relating to Biological Management/Management of Rhino population were developed through the Rhino Lab that took place in August 2016. The outcomes of the Lab gave effect to a number of Cabinet decisions on interventions required to further promote rhino conservation.

A Rhino research workshop was held in 2017 to develop a National Research Strategy for white and black rhinos. Through this exercise, our government and the Scientific Society of South Africa prioritises key research areas that will continue to close gaps in areas such as community involvement, governance and legislation, range expansion and economic values.

2.3 Rhino Guardians

In 2017 we initiated the rhino guardian programme in the Kruger National Park. It has three elements – surrogacy for rhino orphans, guardianship of black rhino and detailed monitoring of black rhino in specific areas. This programme is being rolled out incrementally around the country.

2.4 Poaching Statistics

I will turn now to the rhino poaching statistics for 2017.

There has been a minor decrease in the number of rhino poached nationally in 2017. A total of 1 028 rhino have been poached from 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017 compared to 1 054 in the same period for 2016, representing a decrease of 26 animals.

With regards to the Kruger National Park (KNP) which as you know has traditionally borne the brunt of poaching, a total of 504 rhino rhinos were poached between January - and the end of December 2017. This is 24% **less** than the 662 recorded in 2016.

As a result of our anti-poaching strategy in the KNP, we are now seeing a decrease in the number of poacher activities in the park with a total of 2 662 recorded in 2017 compared with 2 883 in 2016. This represents a percentage decrease of 7, 6%.

Whilst there has been a decrease in the number of rhino killed for their horns in the Kruger National Park, the number of rhino poached unfortunately increased in KwaZulu-Natal, Northern Cape, Mpumalanga, Free State and North West.

It is with concern that we also report that in 2017, 67 elephants were poached in the Kruger National Park and one was poached in KwaZulu-Natal. Specific risk areas have been identified and strategies to address the threat are being adapted and implemented.

3. Long-term Sustainability Interventions

3.1 Domestic Trade in Rhino Horn

We now want to turn to a matter that has received a great deal of attention from the media, and that is the domestic trade in rhino horn.

As you will be aware, in 2017 the domestic sale of rhino horn became legal following a Constitutional Court order that upheld a 2015 High Court decision lifting the 2009 moratorium.

The domestic sale of rhino horn is conducted subject to the issuing of relevant permits in terms of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, its regulations and applicable provincial legislation.

Section 57 (1) of NEMBA provides that a person may not carry out a restricted activity involving specimen of a listed threatened or protected species (TOPS) without a permit.

In order for the selling/buying permits to be considered, there are key requirements that must be met, inter alia, documentary proof of legal possession, no criminal record under NEMBA, rhino horn registered on national database, and a DNA certificate.

The Minister of Environmental Affairs is currently the issuing authority for permits relating to domestic rhino horn trade for seven provinces, while we finalise arrangements with the two remaining provinces. This follows the written agreement between the MECs and the Minister in terms of section 87A (3) of National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 2004 (Act No.10 of 2004) (NEMBA).

The commercial international trade does however remain prohibited by the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and South Africa is a party to CITES.

Since the rhino horn domestic sale moratorium was set aside in 2017, the following permits in respect of domestic trade in rhino horn were issued:

- 7 permits issued for buying rhino horn at an auction;
- 2 permits issued for selling of rhino horn at an auction;
- 1 permit issued for selling rhino horn (as a direct sale between individuals); and

- 2 permits were refused for the buying of rhino horn due to non-compliance with the regulatory requirements.

In 2017, the Department of Environmental Affairs published for public comment a set of draft regulations relating to a proposed domestic trade.

All comments received during the public participation process that were initiated on 8 February 2017 have been considered, and the provisions of the draft regulatory measures have been finalised.

In addition to restrictions contained in the regulations published in February 2017, additional restrictions will be published for public participation in due course. The amendments are based on the core principles of Existing Legal Requirements, Strategic Intent, as well as Traceability and Control.

3.2 Communities

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Facilitating increased economic participation for communities is in line with government's National Biodiversity Economy Strategy (NBES). The overall aim is to contribute to the reduction of poverty in rural areas through the development and optimisation of natural resources.

One of the benefits of the NBES is to create a legitimate economy for communities deterring them from rhino poaching-related activities.

Amongst the successes for 2017 have been the following:

- The donation of 625 heads of game to new and emerging farmers, was done in coordination with provincial conservation authorities. This will ensure the realisation of the 2030 target to increase the ownership of game by previously disadvantaged communities.
- 46 emerging farmers from Community Property Associations (CPA's) were trained on the wildlife economy.
- 1 346 Environmental Monitors have been deployed in rhino poaching hotspots to assist with environmental protection. These Environmental Monitors will be further empowered to become Rhino Ambassadors in these rhino poaching hotspots.
- Technical guidelines have been developed on the implementation of a restorative justice programme which is aimed at ensuring that rhino poachers become either Rhino Ambassadors or perform community service.

4. New Interventions & national and international cooperation

4.1 Resourcing anti-poaching and rhino security initiatives

The fight against rhino poaching has been greatly enabled through the assistance of a range of donors including but not limited to the GEF, the the Peace Parks Foundation, the WWF, various US government agencies and government departments and other international funders.

As the South African government we remain immensely grateful for the assistance: material and moral – of a range of stakeholders. This isn't just our big donors but also the NGO community and members of the public.

Without you we would not be realizing these successes and I want to thank you all once again.

In the period under review we have been able to implement a number of projects with the assistance of our donors.

The major recipient of our funds from the GEF 5 Rhino project was the University of Pretoria's Veterinary Genetics Laboratory (VGL).

We provided funding in terms of the work plan which covered genotyping of 6 000 routine samples and extended funding for an additional 5 200 stockpile samples. All rhino horn DNA samples are recorded in the RhODIS database.

In addition, we will be paying for a new DNA analyser and the fees associated with ISO 17025 certification according to the work plan.

We purchased an additional forensic trailer with all the necessary equipment for processing rhino crime scenes for the Eastern Cape Provincial Environmental Management Inspectors (EMIs).

The three major programs from this work are the Patrol Optimization Program, IBM Analyst Notebook/ i2 database/Intellishare and the Integrated Smart Parks Programme.

The purchase of new technology to enable provinces to share information in a central national system and also enable multiple web-based users to analyse data in a central repository, uniting their efforts and boosting efficiency in the fight against rhino poaching.

The MOA with Peace Parks Foundation (PPF) for DEA's participation with GEF funding in the Integrated Smart Parks Programme was completed in December 2017. The GEF contribution will pay for cyber security as part of this programme.

The development of the Integrated Smart Parks Programme entails the deployment of a collection of integrated technology solutions that together create a connected environment to enable seamless collection and consolidation of real-time data from various devices and sensors throughout the Park for greater wide area situational awareness.

The primary decision support tool and operating platform is still CSIR's new technology platform. We are looking at obtaining funding for the next three years to ensure that the deployment of this system continues. This will provide continuity and sustainability of a key component of our technology efforts. All other departments continue to fund this programme as well through their respective internal budgets.

4.2. International and regional cooperation

In March 2017, DEA, the DPCI and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) in a collaborative effort approached the Diplomatic community to raise awareness and dialogue at diplomatic levels, with the focus on combating wildlife trafficking. This is an ongoing engagement.

DIRCO has opened channels to engage with Government of Myanmar at the 1st Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) between the Myanmar and South Africa in August 2017 to strengthen bilateral relations focussed on Combating transnational crime, including wildlife trafficking - in particular regarding rhino horn and elephant ivory and human trafficking.

South Africa and Vietnam participated in an International Consortium of Combating Wildlife Crime (ICWC) meeting in October 2017 to exchange sensitive information amongst wildlife, customs and intelligence investigators.

The aim of the meeting was to identify CITES risk indicators, to assist countries with the detection of cargo and containers potentially carrying illegal wildlife products, mapping out relevant criminal syndicates and discussions on topics such as real time information exchange, operational execution, case management and facilitating joint integrated operations through platforms such as INTERPOL, World Customs Organization and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime.

International cooperation is a critical component of our overall response strategy to the scourge of illegal wildlife crime. In this regard, we have continued to cooperate with a number of strategic partners across the world.

We are pleased to announce that South Africa's latest international project under the 6th replenishment of the Global Environment Facility (GEF 6) has been submitted for approval.

This project will be implemented under the auspices of the Global Wildlife Programme coordinated by the World Bank. The seven-year, \$131 million grant program is expected to leverage an additional \$704 million in additional co-financing from a wide range of partners to promote investments across Africa and Asia. Our project is titled "Strengthening institutions, information management and monitoring to reduce the rate of illegal wildlife trade in South Africa".

It will specifically carry out activities to improve monitoring and management of iconic CITES-listed species threatened by illegal and unsustainable levels of international trade, and develop appropriate community governance mechanisms and management tools that will ultimately lead to improved wildlife monitoring and a reduction in illegal wildlife trade from South Africa.

4.3 MOU's

International cooperation is a critical component of our overall response strategy to the scourge of wildlife crime. In this regard, we have continued to cooperate with a number of strategic partners across the world and activities are being implemented in terms of our existing MoU's.

Mozambique:

Since the incorporation of the Greater Lebombo Conservancy in Mozambique into the Greater Limpopo Trans frontier Park, our rhinos continue to enjoy protection.

We continue to register progress in terms of our MoU with fellow rhino range state Mozambique.

The last meeting held by the Joint Management Committee between the two countries in December 2017, a noticeable success is that the South African Police Services (SAPS) and the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) participated in the meeting.

Our collaboration continues show progress with three of the eight villages abutting the KNP and located within the LNP having been resettled. This is most probably one of the many contributing factors to the reduction in the rhino poaching in the KNP.

In 2017, a team of South African experts visited the Limpopo National Park to explore the potential of implementable renewable energy projects aimed at improving the lives of communities living in those areas, as part of the GLTFCA Sustainable Livelihoods Strategy.

Zimbabwe

The governments of South Africa and Zimbabwe signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on the 3rd October 2017, in Pretoria on Biodiversity and Conservation. As a result, both countries will establish a Joint Management Committee (JMC) to fully and successfully implement the signed MoU.

Conclusion

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is clear from what we have reported to you as a team this morning that we continue to register successes in our fight against rhino poaching, but we are equally aware that the battle is far from won.

That we have seen such notable successes as the decrease in poaching rates in the Kruger National Park (KNP). However, this does not give cause for complacency or for us to be less vigilant.

The increases in other provinces, coupled with the sharp rise in elephant poaching tells us that as we progress and evolve, so do the tactics and methods of the poachers. It is up to us to remain ahead of the game at all times.

We will in the year ahead continue to draw on our achievements, learn from our mistakes, and adapt international best practice. It is only through a collaborative approach that we have come this far – which is a long way from where we were a few years ago.

We would like to thank our real heroes – our rangers and all our law enforcement agencies who remain at the frontline of this fight. Without their efforts we would surely be seeing more losses than we have.

We want to once again call on members of the public to report any suspicious activities around wildlife to our environmental crime hotline which is 0800 205 005 or the SAPS number 10111.

I thank you.

For media inquiries contact Albi Modise on 083 490 2871