

A moratorium on rhino hunting – some thoughts and recommendations

South Africa holds about 93% of the African populations of Near Threatened Southern White Rhino *Ceratotherium simum simum* and Critically Endangered Black Rhino *Diceros bicornis*. The Black Rhino is slowly recovering from a 90% decline in the 1970s. But rhino poaching in South Africa has escalated rapidly since 2008 and has also spread from historically targeted protected areas to privately owned populations.

In a recent statement Minister of Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa, said that she intended to “engage with the various provincial Environment MECs to look at the possibility of placing a moratorium on the hunting of rhinoceros.” She said that this was one of a number of measures that she was contemplating to further strengthen interventions to ensure that our rhino populations are conserved.

This document describes the views of the Endangered Wildlife Trust, Wilderness Foundation, Wildlife Ranching SA, conservationist Braam Malherbe and the Private Rhino Owners Association, on a moratorium on rhino hunting in South Africa.

Understanding the processes for managing trade in rhinoceros

CITES is the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, an international agreement between governments of various countries, which aims to ensure that international trade in specimens of wild animals and plants does not threaten their survival.

CITES Appendix I is a list of species that are threatened with extinction, and international trade in specimens of these species is prohibited, except when the purpose of the import is not commercial, for instance for scientific research. In these exceptional cases, trade may take place provided it is authorised by the granting of both an import permit and an export permit or re-export certificate.

CITES Appendix II lists species that are not necessarily threatened with extinction but that may become so unless trade is closely controlled. It also includes species that look like those of species listed for conservation reasons. International trade in Appendix II species may be authorised by granting an export permit or re-export certificate. No import permit is necessary for these species under CITES, although some countries have taken stricter measures than what CITES requires, and an import permit is needed here. Permits or certificates for Appendix II species should only be granted if the relevant authorities are satisfied that certain conditions are met, above all that trade will not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.

Currently the Black Rhino is listed under Appendix I. However, since CITES does not classify sport hunting as trade, an annual hunting quota of five surplus males is allowed in South Africa. These must be animals whose removal will satisfy specific criteria that were developed to ensure that their removal from a population will improve the demographic or genetic conservation of that population. The criteria being used are defensible and credible and the system has been working well. However, there are currently problems with White Rhino hunting.

In some areas of its ranges the Southern White Rhino is also listed under Appendix I. However in South Africa and Swaziland it is listed under Appendix II, but only for the export of hunting trophies and live animals to approved and acceptable destinations. Only one White Rhino may be hunted per hunter per year in South Africa.

- For more on CITES please visit www.cites.org.
- For more on marking rhino horns and hunting White Rhinos visit: <https://www.ewt.org.za/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=PkxSWjeFF6g%3d&tabid=145>).

Thoughts on a moratorium on rhino hunting

Implementing a moratorium on hunting may have unintended and negative consequences which are prejudicial to Southern White Rhino conservation as a whole. It is suggested that other more targeted actions would be more effective.

- Pseudo-hunting is the practice whereby supposed trophy hunters either need to be told how to shoot or leave the actual shooting to an accompanying Professional Hunter or land owner, a practice that is illegal in South Africa. Sometimes these “hunters” pay above market prices for hunts, yet forego proper trophy preparation. In the case of rhino hunting the implication is that these “hunters” are in fact abusing the legal system in order to obtain rhino horn for illegal sale. One person is in effect acquiring several rhino hunting permits per year, under the guise of fake hunters. The rise of this practice in South Africa in recent years, especially in the North-West Province, has put our country under increasing international and domestic pressure and criticism.
- The issue of pseudo-hunting needs to be urgently addressed, or South Africa can expect to face a proposal to relist its White Rhino under Appendix I at the next CITES Conference of the Parties in March 2013.
- Many of South Africa’s state run parks are near their productive carrying capacities and need to remove surplus animals to maintain optimum productivity. To allow the continued expansion of rhino range and numbers, and so enable overall numbers in the country to continue to grow rapidly, the private sector and communities therefore have to provide the new conservation land for rhino. The extent to which they can do this largely depends on economic incentives and the perceived risk of managing rhinos.
- Historically, live sales, eco-tourism and limited sport hunting have provided economic incentives for the private sector and communities to conserve rhino. This has led to an increase in rhino range and the number of rhinos being managed by the private sector and communities, and there are now estimated to be more than 4 500 White Rhinos conserved on private land in South Africa.
- State conservation agencies have in the past used much of the money raised from live White Rhino sales to either help subsidise the high cost of their conservation efforts (making up the shortfalls in government grants) or in the case of South African National Parks (SANParks), to assist with buying additional conservation land.
- White Rhino sales have been the biggest contributor to total turnover at Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW) game auctions, both live and catalogue, accounting for 74.9% of total turnover from 2008 to July 2011. The current weighted average price obtained per White Rhino from EKZNW and SANParks 2011 sales combined is R234

405. As such, any decline in demand for surplus rhino and any declines in price will also negatively affect state conservation agencies' ability to execute their greater conservation mandate.

- The increase in poaching has led to a number of rhino owners viewing their animals as a liability. This could result in reduced demand for live rhino and a corresponding drop in prices. It is too early to confirm if this is the case but there are already signs that some smaller rhino owners are selling off all their animals, and there has been a drop in the average price achieved for White Rhino from 2008 to 2010. However, following many well publicised arrests and some recent convictions there are signs that prices are holding up and the average price achieved so far this year per live White Rhino by SANParks and EKZNW Wildlife is up, although off 2008 highs.
- Historically it is believed that White Rhino hunting has contributed to increasing live sale prices. There is therefore a concern that a moratorium on hunting may result in a reduction in prices, and more rhino owners may sell their animals. This would mean a big reduction in the estimated 22 274 km² of conservation land that private land owners currently contribute.
- Strictly implementing the current permitting and hunting protocols, with extra attention applied to the current transgressors (landowners and Professional Hunters), would largely address the rise of pseudo-hunting of White Rhino. Furthermore, as discussed below, moves towards a national managed permitting process would be advantageous.
- In the past, it was not necessary to have a national hunting quota for rhino, as the number of top dollar hunters from traditional hunting countries such as the United States was limited and as such, market forces dictated that only a limited and sustainable number of White Rhino were hunted every year. However, with the rise of pseudo-hunting and involvement of so-called 'hunters' from non-traditional hunting countries, the number of rhino now being hunted is increasing. There have also been allegations that inappropriate animals, such as six-year-old cows that are still actively contributing to the population, have been hunted.
- As indiscriminate, illegal rhino hunting increases, the number of rhinos that can be sustainably hunted will decrease. There is therefore a concern that unregulated hunting may rise to unsustainable levels and become prejudicial to good conservation and population growth. Given this background, and the problems experienced in a small number of provinces, now is probably the time to move towards setting a nationally controlled quota for White Rhino hunts, developing criteria to ensure that only a sustainable number of animals of the appropriate age and sex are hunted each year, and to implement additional controls to minimise pseudo-hunting.
- To avoid "put and take hunts", whereby rhino are literally "put" into an area only to be "taken" via hunting straight away, regulation 24 of the Threatened or Protected Species Regulations (ToPS) published in 2007, in terms of the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act 10 of 2004 (NEMBA), which clearly states that rhinos must have been released in an area for a minimum of 24 months before being hunted, must be enforced. This would ensure that these animals have had a chance to establish a genetic line in the population before being hunted, so contributing to conservation of the species.
- Control of White Rhino hunting could be improved if permitting was handled at a national level. Ideally there should be a quota, which could be adjusted according to poaching rates and rhino numbers in the country. Furthermore, decision making frameworks for assessing hunting permit applications should be developed and implemented. For example, consideration could be given to the number of rhinos

that have already been hunted on a particular property, the age and sex of the animal to be hunted, the size of the population and property, whether or not the animal has had an opportunity to become a founder animal in that population and whether or not that property has been fully compliant in providing information on rhino numbers and horn stockpiles. An example of compliance would be whether the relevant permits are in place and the reserve concerned is regularly supplying updated information on rhino numbers, movements and horn stockpiles.

Recommendations

- In light of the concerns outlined above, the Endangered Wildlife Trust, Wilderness Foundation, Wildlife Ranching SA, conservationist Braam Malherbe and the Private Rhino Owners Association do not support a hunting ban on White Rhino trophy hunting.
- To address the pseudo-hunting issue, current permitting and hunting protocols must be strictly implemented, with extra attention paid to the current transgressors (land owners and Professional Hunters), especially in the North West Province.
- There should be a move towards a national White Rhino hunting quota (building poaching into this number), with incentives to be offered to those rhino owners helping with metapopulation biological management and who are compliant with legislation.
- There should be a move towards a nationally managed hunting permit system.
- A biodiversity management plan for White Rhinos must be developed as a matter of urgency and we are encouraged a workshop to develop this is to be held later this month.

Compiled by the Endangered Wildlife Trust with input from the SADC Rhino Management Group - 4 October 2011.

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