

# Comments

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The next meeting of the Conference on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) is to take place in Zimbabwe in July 1997. At a recent workshop, "Sustainable Use Options for Rhino Management" – held at the National Parks Headquarters in Pretoria in November 1995 and attended by the principal players in rhinoceros conservation in South Africa today, together with economists and leading non-governmental organisations – it was clearly recognised that South Africa's preparedness for the next CITES meeting needs considerable planning.

Aspects that will be coming up for discussion in July will be the question of the listing of the white rhinoceros on Appendix 2 of CITES and the possibility of establishing a legal trade in rhino horn and other products.

The issue of legal trade in rhino horn was broadly discussed at the important November workshop. The purpose of that meeting was exploratory, to gain an overview of what the various representatives felt within South Africa. If there is any serious belief that a legal trade in rhino horn would ever be possible, with the attendant benefits being ploughed back into rhino conservation, it is clear that there needs to be a unified approach to the issue.

We need to commence an effective public relations campaign on the question of sustainable utilization. The official representatives at





CITES need to be backed in future by many more representatives from the non-governmental organisations. Funding for rhino and elephant conservation is going to become increasingly difficult within South Africa. Where is the approximate U.S. \$1 200 per square kilometre per year to effectively conserve rhinoceros populations in South African sanctuaries going to come from?

The whole question of a legal trade in rhino horn, as far as the private landowner is concerned, requires attention. As businessmen, owners perceive rhino horn stocks as a valuable commodity that has to be secured at considerable expense. They would like to realise that asset. By contrast, it is not unreasonable to expect others in Africa who care about rhino conservation to be extremely nervous about any suggestion of reversing the original ban. We need to talk to one another and debate these issues.

It is of the utmost importance that private sector participants are seen to be responsible in the management of rhinoceros – especially as regards sport hunting, security, training, and the monitoring of rhino populations – and that there

is ultimately an increase in both black and white rhino populations on private land. The recent survey of white rhinos on private land has shown a dramatic increase in the number of privately owned rhinos throughout South Africa (See “Survey: Rhinos on Private Land” in this issue of the *Rhino & Elephant Journal*). Perhaps the most significant finding of the survey is that the increase can be attributed to breeding taking place in these private sanctuaries. This will be a key aspect in the preparation for the CITES session.

Perhaps the private sector should commence an awareness campaign focusing on the importance of living rhinos in terms of land value, linked to tourism and game farming, which in turn are directly related to foreign exchange, creation of job opportunities, and potential community upliftment.

Having a CITES meeting virtually in our own back yard, in Zimbabwe, presents all concerned with an opportunity for careful assessment of courses of action most likely to serve the interests of rhino species and rhino owners. CITES is coming to us – we must be ready for it.

**CLIVE WALKER**