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ZIMBABWE RHINO POLICY AND MANAGEMENT PLAN

Approved by the Minister of the Ministry of Environment and Tourism

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BACKGROUND

At the time the black rhino (Diceros bicornis minor) was put on Appendix I under the CITES Convention in 1973, there were some 50 000 individuals on the African continent. Following a serious poaching onslaught the population was reduced to less than 3 000 by 1993. The black rhino population in Zimbabwe was not spared. Zimbabwe rhino population had an estimated 2 095 individuals in 1990. Following heavy poaching in the Zambezi Valley, Sebungwe and the Hwange-Matetsi regions numbers declined to 250 by 1993. This sad period was characterised by:

- the existence of large numbers of the rhino in protected areas as the major reservoir of genetic diversity. Of the 2 095 individuals that existed in 1990, 1 945 were in protected areas and 150 on private land.
- low enforcement capacity in the country of 1 man per 100 sq. km.
- low budgetary allocation.
- negative population growth rate.

An emergency conservation strategy for the rhino was formulated to save the situation. A number of workshops led to the 1992 Zimbabwe Black Rhino Conservation Strategy and the 1993 Black Rhino Conservation Project Emergency Plan. The plan focuses on the establishment of and operations within Intensive Protection Zones. The strategy had as main features, the following:

- the need to conserve viable populations of the black rhino in the Parks and Wildlife Estate. For long term genetic fitness the viable population of the rhino should be more than 1 000 individuals. As the Zimbabwean population was far less than this, the plan focused on the management of all rhinos in the country as a meta-population consisting of several sub-populations. These sub-populations with a recommended size of between 100-200 animals were designed to be in areas within the Parks Estate of greater than 1 000 sq. km (Intensive Protection Zones - IPZs) with ideal habitat, where each animal would be individually monitored.

Four parks (Sinamatela, Matusadona, Chipinge and Matopos) were designated as IPZs. Selection of these against the other parks was based on the following: - suitability of habitat, presence of rhino, long distance from national borders, friendly/collaborative neighboring communities, ease of response, possibility of effective patrolling. Within the IPZs the rhinos were monitored using various techniques including radio telemetry, spoor, and natural marks. Radio collaring is expensive and the batteries have a limited life making this technique difficult to use indefinitely. Spoor identification technique is less expensive and sustainable.

Dehorning was also carried out. A total of 224 black rhinos and 136 white rhinos were dehorned. This was looked at as a deterrent to poachers. The horns grow back at a rate of about 6cm per year. There is little evidence to show that dehorning negatively affected the social and breeding behaviour of the rhino. Dehorning could be looked at as a sustainable way of harvesting the rhino horn.

It was hoped that policing capacity would be increased to 1 man per 20 sq. km. This was never attained, scout density remained at 1 man per 100 sq. km.

- the need to develop breeding nuclei (with a carrying capacity of over 100) and to maintain their genetic variability. Breeding nuclei were defined as translocated populations of the rhino held under semi-intensive conditions with a minimum number of 40 as the founder animals. The nuclei were to be in the Parks Estate or commercial farms large enough to hold 100 animal and willing to accept the rhino and to cooperate with the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management.

Each nuclei was to be managed as a sub-population of the total meta-population.

- the need to develop one or more captive breeding centres in Zimbabwe. A captive breeding centre was never established, but a few animals were taken to Chipangali Wildlife Orphanage as well as Imire Game Park. Captive breeding never achieved significant success.
- the need to continue to support the international ex-situ captive breeding programme viewed not as a substitute for conservation of wild populations but as a form of insurance against the ultimate loss of the species. Since 1982, Zimbabwe has contributed 4 animals to Korea, 2 to Yugoslavia, 6 to Swaziland, 24 to the USA, 9 to Australia, 2 to Germany for captive breeding programmes.

Since the 1993 emergency plan, there have been very few cases of reported poaching of the black rhino and numbers have begun to increase. The population has been growing at a rate of 10%. This has exceeded the 3% rate of increase anticipated in the emergency plan. The 1993 plan should be seen as emergency response to a crisis to stabilize the conservation status of the black rhino.

The white rhino population has not been spared from poaching. Almost the entire population in Hwange (100) was killed in the first four months of 1993 from poaching. The white rhino population in Zimbabwe is also small and is now estimated at 140 animals. Of these 98 are on state land and 42 are on private land. The largest sub-population (52) is in the Matobo National Park. The continental white rhino population is estimated at 7 000 individuals, the majority of which (6 700) are in South Africa.

White rhinos were extinct in Zimbabwe shortly after the turn of the century. These were re-introduced from Natal during the 1960s and 1970s when 130 were brought into the country. White rhinos are best suited to the highveld areas of the country.

Both the white and black rhino conservation situation seems to have stabilised. It is opportune to review the management strategies of both the black and white rhino and set longer term objectives. To this end a workshop, the "Zimbabwe National Rhino Management Plan Framework" was held on 12 December, 1996 at Boulton Atlantica Conservation Education Centre, Harare. Stakeholders, Departmental staff and three international experts on the rhino attended the workshop.

This document which is the outcome of this review, is Zimbabwe's current policy and management plan on both the black and white rhino, stating the Government's aspirations and intentions.

The document gives overall guidelines on the management of rhino.

THE POLICY STATEMENT

The Government of Zimbabwe recognises that the rhinoceros is an important national heritage, and in view of the low numbers of animals at present, will aim to achieve rapid increases in the country's black and white rhino populations to levels of at least 2 000 individuals of each species through meta-population management in suitable habitats through out the country. This will be achieved through the following:

- Establishing a mechanism for coordinated and pro-active management and protection of black and white rhino populations.
- Securing and protecting existing and new populations of rhino throughout the country.
- Ensuring the effective biological management of existing and new populations so as to achieve growth rates of at least five percent per year.

- Establishing and maintaining effective monitoring and evaluation programmes for rhino populations
- Developing economic and social sustainability of Zimbabwe's Rhino Management Programme
- Ensuring the immediate and effective implementation, management and monitoring of the national rhino management plan.

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THE ZIMBABWE RHINO MANAGEMENT PLAN

MANAGEMENT GOAL

To achieve rapid increases in the Zimbabwe's black and white rhino populations to levels of at least 2 000 individuals of each species through meta-population management in suitable habitats through out the country.

Objective 1:

Establish a mechanism for coordinated and pro-active management and protection of black and white rhino populations.

Requirements:

- Dedicate roles and responsibilities for leadership within the Department (National and Provincial), and clarify the expectations and boundaries of decentralised decision-making relevant to leadership at the Provincial Level with full support from the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and other relevant Ministries / Offices;
- Review and revise (as necessary) national policies affecting the efficient and consistent implementation of the national rhino management plan;
- Achieve internal (across Government and General Public) understanding and support of Zimbabwe's Rhino Management Programme;
- Secure and dedicate the necessary human, financial and equipment allocations within the Department to fulfill its roles;
- Effectively utilise the expertise, equipment and financial resources that exist within the private sector and NGOs in order to undertake approved rhino management activities;
- Establish National and Provincial Rhino Management Committees with members from the Department and other relevant Government Agencies, Private Sector, Local Communities and their representative organisations, and relevant NGOs - Membership on the National Rhino Management Committees should include *inter alia* one (elected) representative from each of the Provincial Rhino Management Committees;
 - ⇒ Functions of Management Committees should include coordination, resource sharing, liaison with armed forces and investigations branches, policy development, and meta-population management recommendations;
 - ⇒ Ideally, the Management Committee would be an executive body approved by Government, but failing this it should be established as an advisory body approved by the Minister and the Director of the Department in his/her capacity as Chairman of the National Management Committee must be responsible for championing the recommendations within the relevant Ministries;

- Review and implement legally binding custodianship agreements governing the management of rhinos on private land.

Objective 2:

Secure and protect existing and new populations of rhino throughout the country.

Requirements:

- Effective "Detection" and "Deterrence" programmes with well-organised and maintained networks of informers (far more important than reaction force and capacity);
- National reward system administered locally to maintain confidentiality of informers;
- Pro-active and flexible strategy for improved local community relations (relevant to both IPZs and Conservancies) with the aim of improving local support for rhino management efforts, including informer networks, monitoring, public awareness;
- Clarify links and improved cooperation between rhino management personnel (state and non-state) and investigations departments within the country and neighbouring states;
- Increase man-power in the field with staff at between 1:10 KM² to 1:30 KM², equipped with radios and weaponry, and additional support from mobile units (Note: Sinamatela field staffing currently stands at 1:100 KM²);
- Similar protection provided to all rhinos (in line with meta-population management), thus the power to protect rhinos on private land needs to be clarified and legalised, by for example extending indemnity beyond the Parks and Wildlife Estate for "Honorary Officers" responsible to the Department. This needs to be done in full consultation with the Zimbabwe National Army and the Zimbabwe Republic Police;
- Radio collaring and notching to assist in monitoring movements, and de-horning and evacuation capacity in response to emergency situations, this is particularly critical for individuals in the periphery of the IPZs.
- Security of information with respect to specific numbers associated with specific locations

Objective 3:

Ensure the effective biological management of existing and new populations so as to achieve growth rates of at least five percent per year.

Requirements:

- Establish and support "Rhino Factories" (defined as Free Range breeding groups of 25

Founders reproducing at rates of or exceeding 5% per annum with numbers maintained below Ecological Carrying Capacity¹) to maximise population growth rates;

- Relocate individuals currently existing in small groups and/or in border areas (for security) to supplement other groups to achieve optimum size in suitable habitats (particular attention needs to be given to relocating fragmented White Rhinos);
- Assess potential of new land areas for the introduction and establishment of breeding groups, and relocate rhinos as dictated by numbers and population performance in other areas;
- Relocate surplus animals from successful breeding groups as required;
- Introduce one new founder per generation to each breeding group (every 10 to 15 years) to maintain genetic diversity;
- Continue with radio tracking and introduce ear notching and other methods of individual monitoring population performance and status.

Objective 4:

Establish and maintain effective monitoring and evaluation programmes for rhino populations

Requirements:

- Identify national and regional monitoring and research priorities;
- Identify key variables to monitor for each breeding group in line with priorities - e.g. habitat and nutrition, disease, population performance, etc.;
- Establish monitoring frequency and methodology, with attention given to securing comparative statistics for the key variables from the various breeding groups;
- Maintain and coordinate collaborative research and monitoring programmes;
- Consolidate, synthesise and analyse available information;

¹ While the establishment of Ecological Carrying Capacities warrants further research, as a general rule it is recommended to maintain stocking rates at or below 1 rhino per 15 KM² in the dystrophic midlands and 1 rhino per 10 KM² in the Lowveld. It is critical to factor drought into calculations of E.C.C.

- Develop reports and recommendations against goal and objectives;
- Monitor implementation of management actions;
- Ensure regular meetings between research and management, within the country and with neighbouring states;
- Cost and source funds and capacity to maintain research and monitoring programme, both within and outside government;
- Develop and distribute annual (or semi-annual) operational plans and reports for research and monitoring

Objective 5:

Develop economic and social sustainability of Zimbabwe's Rhino Management Programme

Requirements:

- Optimise non-consumptive values;
- Consider consumptive use where it does not interfere with breeding eg on old individuals;
- Consider alternative use/sale options for rhino horn stocks;
- Consider State support for the import of Breeding Stock, (e.g. direct financial support, or indirect support of private sector financed imports through the waiver of custom duties);
- Identify, develop and implement strategies to generate and appropriately distribute benefits to local communities (possible subject of separate workshop);
- Develop and implement outreach, education and communication programmes targeted at local communities;
- Explore benefit of establishing "Business Management" Team within the Department.

Objective 6:

Ensure the immediate and effective implementation, management and monitoring of the national rhino management plan

Requirements:

- develop a Project Planning Matrix detailing a long term objective, medium term (five

year objective), objectively verifiable indicators, assumptions, external factors (factors that are important for Project success but are outside the control of the Project) and the Outputs.

- develop an annual Project Implementation Plan detailing the activities needed for each Output, the milestones for each activity, the Time Frame, the manpower required to carry out each activity, the resources (including costs) required for each activity etc.
- at the end of each year evaluate progress by reviewing the previous annual work plan indicating the state of implementation of each activity, problems faced in the implementation of each activity, corrective measures taken or to be taken etc.
- about halfway through the Project evaluate success in meeting the Objectives through the degree of achieving indicators.
- evaluate the five year Project.

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