



# Rhino in crisis, **failure not an option**

by Pelham Jones, chairperson WRSA – PROA

**T**he scientific order *Perissodactyla* is shared by rhino and zebra, both being odd-toed ungulates. Within the family *Rhinoceros* there are two species – the white and black rhino. Within the genus there are or were two white and four black sub-species in Africa. Sadly, the northern white and the north-western black rhino are now considered extinct.

Since 1965, it is estimated that over 100 000 black rhino have been poached, leaving a total black rhino population covering three sub-species populations. These being the southwestern black or desert rhino of Namibia, (*Db bicornis*), the south-central black rhino, common in KZN and Zimbabwe, (*Db minor*), and the eastern rhino (*Db michaeli*), found in Kenya and Tanzania, of only about 5 000 animals, of which some 1 700 are in South Africa and 19 500 white rhino, of which 25% are on private reserves.

## **R200 million lost in poaching**

Since poaching hit South Africa, we have lost more than 550 animals, representing a direct financial loss of more than R200 million. Private reserves are now being targeted and are suffering losses equal to all provincial reserves. Some 121 individuals have been arrested to date, 76 cases are before the courts and more than 450 dockets are being investigated by the Hawks. Asset forfeiture pending is now standing at R170 million.

If we look at the loss of 430 poached animals over three years, plus natural mortality and animals hunted, there is a growing call for either a moratorium on hunting or a quota system to be introduced, as at the current off take, the species will soon go into population decline.

## **Resolution**

At the recent DEA ministers summit, a resolution was passed for a study to be carried out to understand what is driving demand for and trade in rhino horn and to investigate the possibility of legalised trade in rhino horn. The road to achieve this will be long, as only once the study results are in and if supportive, we will require a government resolution supporting the proposal. This then has to go to the affected SADC countries for their support, then to CITES. Apparently, it will take total support from African countries and a two-third majority from other countries to approve the proposal at the convention before it will be passed. This could take as long as ten years.

The WRSA Private Rhino Owners Association (PROA) is actively involved in all facets of fighting the rhino crisis, from helping establish security nodes, involvement at ministerial level to media support. They serve on the LeadSA Rhino Security Forum executive board and were recently invited to attend the SADC RMG meeting in Namibia. **WR**