

A BRIEF ON THE RHINO POACHING: A PRESENTATION TO THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS JANUARY 2012.

A WWF PRESENTATION

PREAMBLE:

WWF wishes to congratulate the government of South Africa on efforts so far put into dealing with the escalating poaching pressure and illegal trade currently facing the country.

WWF also wants to recognize the great achievement South Africa as a nation has made in setting itself as a global leader in rhino conservation that has seen the white rhino being brought back from the brink of extinction. One cannot ignore even the present role of the black rhino expansion effort continues to play in actively growing rhino numbers. This contribution not only serves to make South Africa a conservation icon but clearly indicates the potential of this great nation.

WWF sincerely hopes that the gains and global contribution South Africa has played over the century shall be remembered even during this time of the rhino poaching crisis and with this knowledge remain sincere to up-holding its great name as a leader in the conservation world.

This said WWF wishes to state that it remains fully committed in supporting government's efforts in the fight to save the Africa rhino from the current threat and ensure its survival for generations to come.

WWF recognizes the present poaching taking place in Africa and the escalating numbers poached, in particular in South Africa since 2009, as alarming and an unhealthy trend for a species already classified by IUCN as globally threatened. The rate of poaching increase may appear to be faltering, but the bottom line is more rhinos than ever were poached in 2011; a trend which, if not checked, could put the survival of these iconic species in jeopardy. The apparent failure to curb poaching on the ground, to halt the activities of the syndicates that propagate such crimes against nature, and the weaknesses in conservation trade controls and regulatory systems in what was once a vibrant rhino sector warrants concern far beyond the South African borders. A broad integrated approach based upon government actively enforcing its conservation mandate, up-scaling bilateral and regional cooperation - supported by international collaboration with key stakeholders

involved in or associated with the poaching and illegal trade - opens avenues to address and solve the present rhino poaching crisis.

Government and partner efforts to stop poaching have been substantial but results indicate little progress made in stemming the high rate of poaching. The measures and deterrents to poaching such as on-the ground patrols, hot-lines, integrated planning groups and improved technological surveillance are yet to yield positive returns. The current system is struggling to cope under the onslaught of an organized criminal syndicate and the manifestations of this are clearly evident, through:

- a) Very low ratio of number of rhino horn recoveries or confiscations to numbers of horns entering the illegal black markets;
- b) A significantly low rate of successful prosecutions that end up with convictions commensurate to the crime with prolonged investigative periods;
- d) Inadequate integration and coordination between all conservation and relevant sectors;
- e) Low investigative capacities nationally.

The above listed manifestations may be considered as symptoms of an even deeper underlying root cause. There is a greater need to address the driver of rhino horn trade in the implicated states that are the end-users of the horn products. Without a concerted and unified approach on the demand side, we stand the chance of losing decades of successful investments in rhino conservation and put the survival of the Africa rhino in peril. As noted by Emslie et al (1999), the crash in the black rhino numbers in Africa by more than 96% in just 30 years was one of the most rapid declines of any large mammal. Today, the global community holds South Africa in its trust, in having the largest ever African rhino population that now faces direct threat from International trade and global network pressures.

WWF understands the impact of the poaching threat being clearly recognizable leading to:

- **Rhino viability concerns** in the near future with the potential threat of a possible decline.
- **Livelihoods and community based economic** activities reliant on rhinos as iconic symbols for tourism attraction being threatened
- **National income** attributed to rhinos from hunting, local trade and other forms of legal utilization is threatened and on the decline.

- **Habitat loss** for rhinos resulting from rhino owners abandoning rhino ranching based on raising security and protection costs to other less sustainable forms production
- **International reputational risk** for South Africa in as far as being a global leader in conservation and a prime international tourism destination

RESPONSE TO MATTERS ARISING FROM PARLIAMENTARY BRIEF:

1. The strength and weaknesses of the current initiatives to address the problem;

a. Strength of current initiatives

- I. Government support and provision of an enabling environment for targeted interventions and public campaigns to avert the present rhino poaching crisis is greatly appreciated. **This has seen the sprouting of numerous “save the rhino” NGO’s, willing corporates and individuals supporting the noble cause in cash and kind.**
- II. A number of initiatives have taken-off that have sensitized the local general public and international communities, thanks to the active local and international media involvement. **This has given strong focus on the issue of poaching and potential ability for intelligence gathering, information sharing and international engagement.**

b. Weakness of current initiatives

- I. Inadequate coherent and synergistic strategic planning between numerous local NGO’s, and campaign groups with government driven initiatives.
- II. Ineffective capitalization of the communities and public awareness gains made through campaign drives by government and NGO’s. The result is that they have not been sufficiently drawn into being major players in contributing to solving the rhino crisis.
- III. No strong political drive (despite a number of initiatives) with implicated rhino consumer countries to openly address the root cause and take decisive action on those driving and propagating the illegal rhino poaching and trade in rhino horn. All effort is South African based ranging from law enforcement to execution of justice. No reciprocation has been noted from implicated or major transit states in this regards.

- IV. In relation to (III) above, investment has been skewed towards security and protection of critical populations. This is of vital necessity but should not overshadow the need to grow rhino numbers to buffer against overall losses including natural and legal off-takes. Encouraging stronger planned government driven investments in rhino expansion efforts with various sector like communities is recommended.
- V. Limited legal control and enforcement leading to weak prosecution performance with resultant insufficient deterrents to rhino crimes.
- VI. Lack of an adequate integrated approach and coordination of relevant key organs of state in closing all avenues that may present loop holes for the operations of the criminal syndicates propagating the rhino poaching and illegal rhino horn trade. Information sharing, investigations and coordinated actions are required to strengthen the prosecution efforts and create stronger deterrents.
- VII. The South Africa NPA is vibrant but young in terms of handling new emerging wildlife crime.

2. The efficacy of current environmental governance structures to address the problem;

The current South African governance structure is recognized as one of the best in Africa and provides the appropriate enabling base for effective and efficient functionality to stop poaching. However, a system is only as good as the components that actually drive it - in this case the human resource element needs to be addressed.

3. Whether South Africa has the requisite combination of expertise, sufficient and sustained financial capacity, and well-performing institutional and regulatory mechanisms to maintain an effective and balanced intervention to rhino poaching;

South Africa amongst other rhino range states has a wealth of experienced conservationist, law enforcement agents and local adequate technical capacity; more uniquely, South Africa is the only Africa country that lends itself to a complex multi-pronged rhino production (private, provincial, state and community) and management system. Through this approach South Africa has become to be known as a nation that has brought rhinos back from the

brink of extinction and has undeniably seen its populations grow at well over the expected 5% since 1895, resulting in over 20,000 rhino in 100 years. Previously, well controlled and regulated local rhino trade and hunting has been a big contributor to incentivizing rhino production in South Africa. South Africa today still holds and retains its ability as in the past to subdue the current crisis and has greatly improved on putting in place adaptive mechanisms to deal with the crime at hand. The question is what has changed? Should we be responding in favour of illegal global market pressures by forsaking our successful ways in which we safe guarded and grew our rhino populations?

4. Recommendations to address specific challenges and responses of the present regime pertinent to the practitioner, regulator and policy-maker.

Short Term Initiatives:

- A. Galvanizing International Support for Change: Strong diplomatic political drive is required by government of South Africa to address the illegal trade, impact of rhino poaching and implications for the survival of the species with implicated and transit states directly and through international bodies supported by appropriate conventions and agreements. This would involve:
- I. Special appeals by South Africa to have Interpol raise rhino crimes to a higher priority level or make it a priority crime allowing for more concerted international contribution to clamp down on the international syndicate operations network globally.
 - II. Bilateral dialogue and up-scaling of current efforts with Implicated and transit states on illegal rhino trade, trade chain disruption, respecting medicinal bans, implementation of appropriate legislation and strategically targeted campaigns or initiatives in implicated and transit states. This should include advocating through diplomatic means strengthening of rhino (wildlife) legislation and prosecution of associated rhino crimes.
 - III. There is need to address international law enforcement initiatives to ensure compliance to trade standard.

- IV. Demand national and international legislation that would exclude rhino horn products in any manufactured or doctor-to-patient medicine mixes, this takes into cognition that in some Asian countries it has been illegal since 1993.
- V. An immediate up-scaling and tightening of law enforcement, vigilance, strategic deployments and strengthening forensic evidence efforts.
- VI. A South Africa led initiative, on behalf of all Africa rhino range states, producing a joint action statement such as joint communiqué to both implicated and transit states on the current rhino crisis.

Medium Term Initiatives

- B. Private Sector Re-organization and Re-structuring: The sector has contributed immensely to the survival and growth of the Africa rhino in South Africa. However we recognized that significant governance issues do exist, resulting in lack of transparency. Structural fragmentation of the sector that in the past promoted efficiency, enabling better self-regulation and control over various rhino management matters has come to the point that the sector is being tarnished by a few mis-guided elements in their midst. Governance of the sector, database management and regulatory functions may be better placed under a Board on which the landowners, Government and relevant conservation bodies are represented. We also consider that a much stronger community participatory engagement with private sector should be encouraged and actively promoted as a long term sustainable conservation measure.

- C. Centrally Regulated Rhino Industry: A National rhino coordination office is required that will provide and ensure adequate compliance and appropriate functionality of the rhino sector. This office would ensure a greater degree of cooperation between provincial and national wildlife management and regulatory authorities across South Africa.

- D. Research into Legalization of rhino horn trade: There is a growth in support a legal rhino horn trade is echoed as a “silver bullet” to solve the present crisis. This however, has been based on many economic assumptions, postulations and correlation to other non-sustainable forms of resource utilization such as the diamond industry. At this point in time we see this notion lending itself to greater unforeseen risks and few if any guarantees towards survival of the rhino across Africa. In the recent past South Africa sustained and grew the rhino industry quite successfully based on local internal trade and on limited hunting. Recapitalization, providing new or additional incentives to the sector in which subsidies are considered and policy adjustments made would serve a more sustainable way forward. It is advisable that attention is put into understanding the outcomes from studies that have been proposed that look drivers of the rhino horn market, possible ways of shutting down the illegal trade, dispelling associated myths but also investigating and understanding the implications both in the short and long term of a possible legal rhino horn trade.
- E. Strengthening of the Judicial System: It has been noted that there is a slow progress in carrying out investigations that match the complexity of the crime at hand. Ironically, South Africa has one of the most comprehensive wildlife legislations in Africa and a judicial system that is internationally recognized as being astute. The National Prosecution Authority has an able but young force that faces a new emerging wildlife crime situation. It is recommended that greater resourcing, including financial facilitation, training and international exposure is considered to boost their knowledge and performance potential for desirable end results. This recommendation may be propagated based upon the need for awareness and training initiatives with the judiciary in other producer and transit countries too allowing for greater Africa wide harmonization and concerted prosecution efforts. This in no way should ignore the role magistrate’s play and their need for team building initiatives.

Long term Initiatives

- F. International collaborative Initiatives: That seek to:
- I. Understand the global dynamics of market forces comprehensively in relation to rhino horn specifically and wildlife products in general
 - II. Sustain large-scale awareness campaigns in both markets and source countries
 - III. Derive and promote the existence of direct and indirect benefits for communities and surrounding key populations – added value for rhino conservation efforts.
 - IV. Identification and engagement of multi-national agencies to support the global fight against illegal wildlife trade and its drivers.