

Sebakwe News

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Should We Have Legal Trade In Rhino Horn ?

The killing of rhino for the illegal sale of their horn is continuing unabated. Last year in South Africa 448 rhino were killed by poachers and in the first four months of this year 177 rhino have been killed in South Africa.

There have been 58 thefts of rhino horn from European museums by Irish organised criminal gangs involving the theft of 72 separate horns, eight entire heads with 16 horns and 3 carved “libation cups”.

In Asian countries and especially Vietnam and China, the retail value of rhino horn has risen to USD 60,000 per kilo as compared to the value of gold which is USD 52,500 per kilo. This makes a large horn worth over £200,000. Poaching by criminal syndicates has been encouraged by this increase in value following rumours that rhino horn can cure cancer, despite there being no proof that rhino horn has any beneficial medical qualities. It is also a myth that rhino horn is valued as an aphrodisiac.

In Zimbabwe and South Africa stocks of rhino horn have built up from rhino that have died a natural death, from dehorning, and from the confiscated illegal rhino horn. There is growing pressure from those Governments holding stocks of rhino horn for a relaxation of the ban on the sale of rhino horn made by CITES.

We can dismiss any ideas of poisoning rhino horn as impracticable and it is also morally unacceptable to attempt to kill other human beings who are innocent end users. The farming of rhino for horn can be compared to the production of bile from bears or the breeding of tigers for bone and other body parts and would be totally unacceptable to conservationists on animal welfare grounds.

Rhino killed by poachers in South Africa

<u>Year</u>	<u>No</u>
2007	12
2008	83
2009	122
2010	333
2011	448



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However there is a growing argument in favour of a relaxation of the ban on the sale of rhino horn on the grounds that it would reduce the value of the horn and decrease the poaching. It could also allow funds from the sale of horn to be made available for rhino conservation but in reality such a commercial approach is only likely to benefit the farmers, hunters, businessmen and corrupt officials.

The counter argument against legalising sales of rhino horn is that by flooding the market and reducing the value of horn we might actually be increasing the demand for rhino horn by the end user who can buy more cheaply and thus encourage more poaching. A relaxation of the ban would also make it more difficult to police the trade and distinguish between legal and illegal rhino horn.

At the recent Rhino Mayday meeting in London, Mary Rice from the Environmental Investigation Agency said *that two controlled sales of ivory stockpiles have failed to stem the flow of illegal ivory to East Asia, and specifically to China. In fact, the legal sales appear to have stimulated demand and consequently contributed to an increase in illegal ivory flow and the poaching of elephants. Investigation by the EIA indicates that the latest legal sale of ivory in 2008 has clearly failed to either reduce the price of ivory or curb illegal trade. This failure should be recognised and not repeated. The biggest threat to elephants is now the regulated domestic market. Opening up trade hasn't worked for elephant, and it will not work for rhinos either.*



I remain unconvinced that legalising the trade in rhino horn is the right way forward. Under CITES rules, live rhino and regulated hunting trophies can still be traded from South Africa and Swaziland. We must tighten up the CITES regulations so as to enforce a complete ban on the hunting of rhino and the trade in sales of live rhino and hunting trophies.

We must improve the anti poaching security for the protection of wild rhino populations, which will include dehorning in some instances. We must invest in more environmental education and raise the standards of basic welfare and lifestyles of local communities around the conservancies so that they benefit from wildlife conservation.