

CRITICISMS OF A LEGAL TRADE IN RHINO HORN

The following are some of the primary criticisms against a proposed legal trade in rhino horn. We raise them here and provide our responses to each of them.

✧ **The demand is too great. There are not enough rhinos/horn to support it**

This is an extremely valid concern. From historical records and the ongoing eradication of rhinos in Africa and Asia, it appears that the demand certainly is large and here to stay.

We feel that it is therefore imperative to encourage the breeding and protection of rhinos or we will most certainly see them go extinct. Rhino horn is a renewable resource and this resource can be increased if incentives are in place to conserve rhinos.

We also feel that in the government's discussions with consumer countries, this concern should be a priority and it should be emphasized that any potential trade in horn stocks will have a ceiling limit. All consumer countries should be made aware of this limit and should be encouraged to respect it. This limit will naturally increase as rhino numbers increase.

Furthermore, logic dictates that if the demand is currently unsustainable and we take no steps to turn it into a sustainable one, we will fail to save the rhinos of the world.

In essence, we should at least try to meet some of the demand instead of hiding away from it out of fear that we may not succeed.

✧ **It is unethical to promote a 'bogus' product.**

We feel that it is unethical to continue to apply the same ineffective policies of the past to a dying species. We also feel that bigotry in the modern-day global village is unethical and antiquated and that we do not have any right to apply Western medicinal and scientific principles to misunderstood Eastern philosophical healing systems and traditions. Aside from not having the right to do so, we feel that any campaigns to attempt to do so will be largely ineffective amongst consumer countries where Western principles are often regarded as irrelevant at best and with contempt at worst.

The simple fact is that the demand and the market for horn exist and we cannot bank on educational campaigns and pleas to save our rhinos. These tactics have not worked for tigers, bears or elephants and they are therefore unlikely to work for rhinos.

✧ **A legal trade in horn will facilitate the illegal trade in horn by creating a channel for it.**

The channel for illegal horn already exists and is thriving with no competition at all – the introduction of competition in the form of a legal trade may go a long way towards correcting the perverse price aspect that currently fuels the poaching onslaught.

We have a fantastic rhino horn DNA database called RhoDIS in South Africa which will help to identify horn and fragments of horn, ensuring that all legal horn can be identified.

✧ **Better law enforcement and a clamp-down on corruption are needed to save the rhino, not a legal trade.**

Market studies have shown that market trends are similar to other contraband – drugs, weapons, etc. Organized crime syndicates handle the market and generally co-opt and/or threaten government officials and others to help them. Bans on these products are unenforceable as evidenced by thriving Black markets. Threats as great as death to offenders are not even punitive enough and syndicates continue to operate despite them.

This is not to say that these measures should not be strengthened but it is clear that they cannot be expected to solve the problem.

⚡ **Legal sales didn't work for ivory so it won't work for rhino horn**

I attach a table that compares aspects of the ivory trade to that of a proposed rhino horn trade to emphasize why the two should not be compared.

IVORY TRADE	PROPOSED RHINO HORN TRADE
Every piece of ivory represents a dead elephant	Rhino horn can be obtained from live animals
Isolated singular sales of ivory	A regular, sustainable trade
9-year moratorium attached, encouraging speculation response of buyers	No moratoriums to be attached
Poorly planned and monitored	Potential to be properly planned, controlled, monitored and audited
Elephants occur through most of Africa and many are in conflict zones – difficult to control, monitor and police	Almost 90% of the world's rhinos are in South Africa
Community management unrealistic as elephants and communities are in conflict for resources	Community management more realistic as White rhinos are not a conflict species.
Many private game ranchers throughout Africa cannot contribute to elephant conservation due to their breeding potential and carrying capacity	Many private game ranchers throughout Africa will contribute to rhino conservation

⚡ **The private sector just wants to make money from horn sales.**

The private sector has historically been an exemplary custodian, breeder and protector of rhinos and other wildlife and it is self-funded. Individuals are entitled to make money from their businesses and if the end-result is conservation and protection of wild species and ecosystems, all the better. If all conservationists were millionaires, the natural world and threatened species would not be in the devastating situations they currently face.

It is naïve to believe that conservation takes place in a vacuum, particularly here in Africa.

A further point is that the private sector only holds 25% of S.A.'s rhino populations so the government stands to gain the bulk of the funds generated from rhino horn sales – funds that are undeniably much-needed in the war against poaching.

✧ **Captive-bred populations of rhinos are 'worthless' in conservation terms.**

Three distinct points make this assumption false.

Firstly, every single White rhino in a captive population is a candidate for reintroduction to a more extensive and/or natural environment. This is due to their generally placid nature (in other words, they may become relatively tame in captive situations but no tamer than the rhinos you see in the Kruger National Park); their niche as grazers (they will not struggle to find food in a more natural environment) and the fact that their horns regrow in a relatively short time period.

There is some debate over the genetic integrity of a captive-bred rhino population but this aspect would be easy to monitor through genetic mapping systems and ancestry records of rhinos. Furthermore, White rhinos have already been through a genetic bottleneck and most of them already stem from a very small gene pool.

Secondly, rhinos that are able to provide horn to the market from captive-bred populations will ease poaching pressure on wilder populations of rhinos. This fact is evidenced by the crocodile, ostrich and other game industries throughout the world.

Finally, male rhinos will have increased economic value and will not only be utilised in the trophy hunting industry. National parks that sell surplus male animals will be able to do so knowing that their animals will probably have a continued long lifespan on a smaller reserve.

With regards,



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