

Weight of horn seized in Vietnam

582 kg



Number of horns

485



Number of seizures in Viet Nam

39



Number of convictions in Viet Nam | 2010 to present

7**



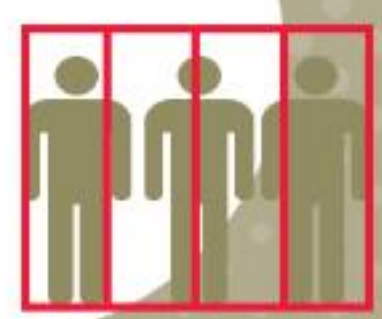
Number of worldwide seizures implicating Vietnamese individuals

48



Number of cases resulting in imprisonment of one or more offenders

3



What is Viet Nam doing to tackle rhino horn traffickers?

Viet Nam is one of the world's largest markets for rhino horn but has a painfully poor track record for enforcement, with very few arrests and even fewer convictions for rhino horn traffickers.

But is there light at the end of the tunnel?

Susie Offord-Woolley | Managing Director

In recent years we have seen two Prime Ministers in Viet Nam issue a directive mandating all enforcement agencies to improve efforts to combat illegal wildlife trade, and the country has signed up to international agreements to tackle the issue such as the London Declaration. However, a report submitted to the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species Conference of the Parties in September 2016 (CITES CoP17) stated that there is little evidence of concerted law enforcement action in Viet Nam.

The report showed that between 2010 and 2015 Viet Nam's authorities made 27 seizures in total but Vietnamese individuals were implicated in 48 seizures. According to evidence collected by Education for Nature Viet Nam (ENV), from 2010–17, there were just seven successful convictions for rhino horn smuggling and trade cases in Vietnam, from which three cases resulted in prison terms for four guilty parties. In contrast, China made 21 successful convictions during the same period according to data collected by the Environmental Investigation Agency (EIA) from publicly available sources.

However, there have been some signs of improvement. From July 2016 to June 2017, Viet Nam made 15 seizures according to EIA's data, compared to two seizures made the year before. On 27 April 2017, a suspected rhino horn kingpin, Nguyen Mau Chien, was arrested along with two members of his wildlife trafficking ring. Chien is suspected to be a leader of a major criminal network that traffics rhino horn, ivory, tigers and other high-value illegal wildlife products into Viet Nam. Police seized 36 kg of rhino horn during the arrest. If Chien is convicted, it would have a big impact on the trade in Viet Nam.

Important changes in the law are due to come in place in 2018 (these have been delayed since 2016) that should remove existing legal loopholes. The Penal Code reform criminalises 'possession' of illegal wildlife products such as rhino horn.



Penalties under the current Penal Code are determined by the monetary value of the wildlife product, which is challenging to determine, particularly when the market is illegal. The new Penal Code reforms have introduced the weight or quantity of seized wildlife as a factor to consider in sentencing. Penalties have also been increased and it will become possible for a rhino horn trafficker to be awarded up to 15 years' imprisonment. A company or organisation can be prosecuted for wildlife crime, whereas previously it was only possible to prosecute an individual. These changes should enable authorities to prosecute any wildlife traffickers successfully.

These recent steps are positive indications that Vietnamese enforcement authorities are starting to take rhino horn trafficking more seriously. It is important that not-for-profit organisations, like our partner on the ground, ENV in Viet Nam, continue to keep the pressure and focus on the law enforcement agencies to respond with the concerted effort needed to tackle this international organised crime.

Data provided by ENV

*This does not include a fair number of smaller seizures of pieces of horn for which weights were not recorded

**This included one kingpin from whom 36 kg of rhino horn was seized