



**UNDER THREAT:** A rhino is treated on a game farm in Limpopo after poachers shot her 15 times. The reader argues that rhino horn should be 'farmed' and trade in the prized commodity legalised.

PICTURE: SUPPLIED

## Legalise rhino horn to save the species

IMAGINE if, deep in the bushveld, we discover that one of our rare tree species produces a fruit that is highly prized by foreigners, and that these foreigners are willing to pay untold sums of money to gain that fruit.

Of course, there is something of a gold-rush as the poorer members of the community strip the trees of their fruit to sell to foreign traders, and the population of the trees begins to decline.

Imagine if, instead of allowing farmers to cultivate the tree to bring in much-needed income (and of course save the tree species), the government steps in and bans the sale of the fruit and supports other countries trying to find a substitute for our fruit product.

Economic madness? Would a government be that stupid?

Well, of course, as the tree numbers continue to decline, desperate and unscrupulous people continue to raid its fruit and, as it becomes rarer, it becomes more expensive.

Sadly, we have a real example of this in South Africa, and that is rhino horn. Would we ban mohair if a few angora goats were poached in the Eastern Cape? Would Western Cape vineyard owners actively campaign for other countries to find substitutes for our home-grown wine?

Then why on Earth do we do the same in the case of rhino horn? Our present policy is clearly not working. Rhino are being killed at an ever-increasing rate, and the rarer they become, the more valuable they become. Economic models have shown that it makes economic sense (from the viewpoint of

poachers, that is) to hunt a species to extinction.

The way to save the rhino is to make it economically rewarding to produce and protect them.

This can only be done by legalising and regulating trade in rhino horn.

Removing the horn does not need to harm the rhino any more than shearing a sheep.

The income generated from the sales can be pumped back into rhino conservation.

Who cares if the Chinese think it's an aphrodisiac? I have found chocolate to be far more successful, but hey – whatever blows your hair back (and no one is saying we should ban chocolate).

I don't understand why some foreigners buy large amounts of South African ostrich feathers – I don't think

they suit most chaps – but I am glad they do, as it brings in much-needed foreign revenue.

Should we ban ostrich feathers?

Would the Arabs ban oil?

Here we have a highly valuable, unique product, and our response is to ban it!

Allow game farmers to sell rhino horn under carefully regulated conditions.

It would bring in foreign revenue and encourage farmers to "grow" and protect rhino.

They would swamp the market, bring down the price, make poaching not worth it and most importantly, save the rhino.

Our present policies are not working and these species are on the brink.

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