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FOUNDATION**
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South Africa's Rhino Horn Stockpiles – Intrinsic To Illegal Trade

WHERE HAVE ALL
THE RHINOS GONE?

PART 2 – 2024



The EMS Foundation was established in South Africa in 2016 as social justice non-profit organisation. The foundation's purpose is to alleviate and end suffering, raise public awareness, and lobby and empower, provide dignity, and promote the rights and interests of vulnerable groups, particularly children, the elderly and wild animals.

The EMS Foundation also has a special interest in biodiversity and supports the five interrelated principles of social justice, namely: equity, access, diversity, participation, and rights. The foundation is cognisant of the entanglements of oppression and is committed to the promotion of inclusive justice, showing compassion across species, and working to build a better future for all through campaigns, research, analysis, advocacy and holding government to account.



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In this Research Report – *South Africa's Rhino Horn Stockpiles: Integral to Illegal Trade – What Next for South African Rhino* – we have presented and analysed previously published media reports and excerpts from previously published media reports. We have also presented and analysed reports and presentations previously published by wildlife trade organisations, scientific reports published by pro-sustainable use wildlife organisations and wildlife conservation organisations. We have presented and analysed previously published reports presented by government and criminal justice departments in South African and abroad. We have presented previously published reports written by investigative journalists, scientists and researchers. We have re-published information including images that are all available on the world wide web and social media platforms.

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Introduction

South Africa's colonial and apartheid wildlife policies of consumptive use, commodification and so-called "sustainable use" in relation to rhinos has remained seamlessly unchanged, even after democracy in 1994. Consequently, South Africa takes a pro rhino horn trade and trophy hunting stance.

Some organisations (and particularly those who own large numbers of captive rhino) advocate the legalization of international trade in horn from captive rhino in order to over-supply the Asian market so that the price drops low enough to disincentivize poaching but not so low that it is unprofitable to farm rhino. The EMS Foundation believes that this strategy cannot work for many reasons, including that it relies on incorrect assumptions (e.g. that South Africa can sustain the production of enough horn to oversupply those markets, and that commercial rhino farmers can out-compete criminal syndicates on price) and because experience (particularly with ivory) shows that the existence of a legal trade increases and facilitates illegal trade.

According to a [press release](#) published in January 2024, the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) Scientific Authority co-ordinator stated that "the evidence suggests that a legal well-regulated trade in rhino horn is key to solving the rhino poaching crisis". As might be expected, the press release was published by a proponent of the legalisation of the international rhino horn trade. The EMS Foundation has written to SANBI for clarification and confirmation of this statement which is in direct contradiction of Minister Barbara Creecy's vision of phasing out of intensive breeding and a reversal of rhino captive-breeding operations, and for the development of alternative revenue streams for rhino breeders. In addition, on the 2nd May 2021 Minister Creecy [announced](#) that South Africa would not lobby the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora to trade in rhino horn internationally until it meets the conditions of a 2016 plan to combat poaching, enhance public participation and rhino horn demand management in destination countries.

To accurately understand South Africa's rapid decline in rhino numbers, particularly over the past two decades, its current pro-trade policy framework needs to be brought into question, as in our view, it is negatively affecting biodiversity including the survival of rhinos.

South Africa plays a pivotal role in the illegal international trade in rhino horn.¹ According to a December 2023 [South African Anti-Money Laundering Integrated Task Force](#) (SAMLIT) report, rhino horn is the key illegal wildlife commodity originating from South Africa.

In the 2021 EMS Foundation [Where Have All the Rhinos Gone?](#) report we highlighted that the devastating loss of rhinos in South Africa is not only the result of the illegal killing of rhinos, it is also the result of: poor and problematic policy and management decisions; the direct involvement of South Africa's professional trophy hunters, rhino breeders, veterinarians and nature conservation officials; and porous borders.

The international trade in rhino horn has been banned since 1977 among the 184 [members countries](#) of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES).

¹ See: Amicelle, A., Cote-Boucher, K., Dupont, B., Mulone, M., Shearing, C., & Tanner, S. (Eds.). (2020). *The Policing of Flows: Challenging Contemporary Criminology* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429299193>. Book Chapter Hübschle, A. Fluid interfaces between flows of rhino horn; Wildlife Justice Commission Rhino horn trafficking as a form of transnational organised crime (2012–2021): 2022 Global Threat <https://wildlifejustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Rhino-Horn-Trafficking-Report-2022-V21-Spreads.pdf>; and <https://us.eia.org/blog/rhino-horn-stockpiles-are-increasing-so-is-their-role-in-the-illegal-international-trade/>

The CITES treaty and resolutions are only pertinent to trade between countries. South Africa allowed domestic trade in white rhino until, in response to the sharp increase killing of rhino, the government imposed a moratorium, banning the trade in rhino horn in South Africa on the 13th February 2009. However, the pro rhino horn trade commercial rhino farmers and breeders launched a legal application to overturn the moratorium and consequently the moratorium on the domestic trade in rhino horn or products or derivatives was declared invalid in 2017. This despite the fact that a domestic market for rhino horn does not exist.

A number of rhino farmers and breeders and their industry colleagues, have over the years been implicated in the illegal sale of hundreds of rhino horn, the suspicious deaths of numerous rhinos and for possession of unmarked rhino horn. While, according to a [2022 Wildlife Justice Commission report](#), intelligence indicates that diverting harvested horns from privately-owned stockpiles in South Africa has also become a major source of rhino horns in illegal trade.

Despite the fact that the number of rhino killed increased by [9000 percent](#) between [2007 and 2014](#), just prior to the CITES Conference of the Parties CoP17 held in South Africa in September 2016, the South African government undertook a comprehensive process to examine the viability of legalizing international commercial trade of rhino horn by appointing a Committee of Enquiry.

In April 2016 the South African Department of Environmental Affairs officially confirmed that they were backing away from a proposal to CITES to legalize the trade in rhino horn. Instead, Swaziland who was accused of acting as [puppet](#) for South African rhino breeders, put forward a proposal for a legal trade. Recent draft sustainable use policies in relation to rhinos, for example the 2023 draft Policy Position on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Elephant, Lion, Leopard and Rhinos does not clearly state that South Africa does not intend to permit international trade in rhino horn and elephant ivory.



Protest Against the Rhino Horn Trade at the Opening of CITES CoP17, Johannesburg 2016

Wildlife ranching has come under sharp criticism because a subset of ranchers engage in [intensive wildlife production](#), for example the breeding of so-called “high-value” wildlife – including rhinos – on smaller areas of land. [Wildlife farming is associated with concerns](#) relating to welfare and well-being, public health and biodiversity conservation, and case studies demonstrate that farming wildlife does not necessarily alleviate pressure on wild populations and the wildlife protection sector who are particularly concerned about these issues have expressed concerns about wildlife breeders who have been incentivized to intensively farm rhinos by keeping them in small enclosures in order to more easily harvest their horn.

South African state and privately owned rhino jointly boast the world’s largest rhino population despite the illegal killing of [70 percent](#) of the rhino in South Africa’s flagship Kruger National Park between 2008 and 2021. With the number of rhinos being so low, the killing of rhino is shifting from the Kruger National Park to the new hunting ground of the KwaZulu Natal province.

The majority of CITES States Parties have shown no appetite for lifting bans on the trade in rhino horns. Thus, the largest breeder of rhinos and harvester of rhino horn in the world, has found the economic model upon which he and others have gambled, flawed and unsustainable.

There is on-going concern that there is extensive leakage from government and private rhino horn stockpiles into the international illegal trade.

The urgent question that the South African government must answer is why is it allowing the stockpiling of rhino horns? Particularly because, by doing so, it is *de facto* placing a dangerously contentious value to the horns in the vain hope that the international market will be reopened. This in turn is endangering the lives of the people who are protecting rhinos, encouraging the black market and bankrupting public and private reserves whilst they attempt to keep their rhinos secure.

Quantifying South Africa’s Rhino Horn Stockpiles

2019

In May 2019 the EMS Foundation submitted a Promotion of Access to Information Act (PAIA) [request to government about rhino horn stockpiles](#) held by privately and by the state.

In response the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries revealed that the government was holding 27 tonnes of rhino horn through SANParks and other government bodies, consisting of 15 003 horns.

According to the PAIA response, the total number of horns held privately was 18 884 horns amounting to 22 tonnes.

2017

After the ban on the domestic trade in rhino horn in South Africa was lifted, in August 2017, Minister of Environment, Edna Molewa said that South Africa was in process of conducting [an audit of all existing stockpiles of rhino horn](#) in an effort to prevent the smuggling of illegally

obtained horn out of South Africa. The audit was meant to ensure that the country has full and accurate information on the number of horns in South Africa at any given time, as the registered owner of each horn.

In 2016 it was rumoured that a large quantity of the rhino horn stockpile at Skukuza had been removed or stolen.² Was the audit perhaps executed in response to this?

“An electronic database that will capture details on all individual rhino horns in private and government-owned stockpiles, as well as all newly acquired horns is currently being developed. South Africa remains committed to a well-regulated process that manages the trade in endangered species such as rhino horn in line with domestic legislation, as well as all Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) provisions. In order to buy or sell rhino horn domestically one needs a permit – issued in terms of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act 2004 (NEMBA) as well as applicable provincial conservation legislation. Prior to legal export, the horn must have been subjected to DNA profiling; must be marked by means of a microchip and a ZA-serial number; the information of the owner of the horn; information relating to its markings must have been recorded in the national database; and the exporter will have to have a CITES permit. This permit also needs to make provision for the export as a Threatened or Protected Species (TOPS) specimen, to be endorsed at the port of exit,” Molewa said.

Molewa emphasised that the commercial international trade in rhino horn remains strictly prohibited in terms of CITES. The Environmental Management Inspectorate (EMI) as well as inspectors from the provincial conservation departments would continue to monitor compliance.

2015

The size of the state-owned rhino horn stockpile was previously publicly mentioned in 2015 when proposals to sell the stockpile were being considered. According to an article [published](#) in February 2015, the South African government contemplated a decision about whether South Africa would go ahead with a once-off sale of its massive rhino horn stockpile was to be taken in April 2016.

Briefing the media in Parliament, Molewa said: “We shall not do so until the Committee of Enquiry has completed its work and presented its findings.”

Another important area of study for this committee was whether a proposal for the legalisation of trade in rhino horn should be made at the CITES 17th Congress of the Parties (CoP17) in September 2016. Minister Molewa stated that the government’s rhino stockpiles totalled [21 tonnes](#) a figure, she said that did not include horns held in private stockpiles.

It is interesting to note that on the 15th June 2016, Minister Molewa met with representatives from the Private Rhino Owners Association (PROA) and Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA).

² See also reference to this incident by Derek Lewitton’s legal advisor James Brackenbury - <https://maroelamedia.co.za/nuus/renosterboer-bly-in-aanhouding/>. Brackenbury claimed that Lewitton is part of a private investigation after a large number of KNP rhino horns disappeared without any explanation from a vault in Skukuza 2016.



2013

The validity of the South African moratorium on the domestic trade in rhino horn was contested in the North Gauteng High Court in 2012.

Incredulously, while this [moratorium was in place](#), on Wednesday 3rd July 2013, Minister Molewa said that the establishment of a well-regulated international trade in rhino horn could help to curb rhino poaching, if implemented in conjunction with all the other interventions to root out the practise. *"We will have to work in partnership with stakeholders and experts to ensure a feasible model for trade is proposed at the next CITES CoP. Cabinet has approved the development and submission of a proposal to the 17th Conference of the Parties of the Convention on the International Trade of Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora scheduled to take place in 2016 in South Africa, to introduce regulated international trade in rhino horn."*

Speaking at the same briefing, the Deputy Director-General: Biodiversity and Conservation at the Department of Environmental Affairs, Fundisile Mketeni, said the [government rhino horn stockpiles](#) stood at 16 437kg or 16.437 tonnes and private sector stockpiles were 2 091kg or 2.091 tonnes. *"We need to go and clear the stock we have. We would like to sell the horns as a whole. It will depend on the trading partner because they know better where there is demand."*

2012

On 4th April 2012 Minister [Molewa said](#) the following: *"the rhino horn stockpile is an area that continues to generate interest. I do want to reiterate that an inventory of the rhino horn stockpile in the possession of conservation agencies in South Africa has been completed but due to security risks the department cannot publicly announce the amount of stocks being held by these agencies."*

Minister Molewa urged private landowners who were in possession of rhino horn stockpiles [to register them](#). She said South Africa had agreed not to propose the legalisation of rhino horn trade during CoP16 in Mexico in 2010. *“Many things still need to be done in order to consider the proposal of dealing with the issue.”* She said among the many things to be considered was that all rhino horns in private and government hands must be registered, must have permits, must be marked and verified.

“One of the most vital things that need to be done includes the issue of identifying partners that we will be dealing with...trading partners must be identified and confirmed, legislation of trading partners must be amended to enable them to legally import and sell rhino horn” she said.

Molewa also stated that there would be a need to develop a proposed system for trade, including appropriate legislative provisions in South Africa and potential recipient countries, which similar to the ivory trade, where Japan and China had to provide for legislative systems to ensure control mechanisms are in place relating to ivory.

South Africa a Major Player and Key Source in the Illicit International Rhino Horn Trade

South Africa was linked to half (fifty percent) of all rhino horns seized globally over the past 10 years and rhino horns from South Africa continue to be a key source for the illicit supply chain.

Whilst rhino poaching rates across Africa have decreased since the peak in 2015, they remain high, at equivalent levels seen at the start of the poaching crisis in 2012.

Africa recorded 2,707 incidences of illegal killings of rhinos from 2018 to 2021, with 90.0% taking place in South Africa. As was noted at the [CITES COP 19](#) meeting: “The estimated overall number of rhinoceroses in Africa is lower than that reported at CoP18 (23,562 by the end of 2017). In this regard, the estimated number of black rhino numbers (6,195 at the end of 2021) was 12.2% higher than the estimate of 5,495 individuals at the end of 2017. In contrast, the estimated number of white rhinoceroses (15,942 at the end of 2021) was 11.8 % lower than the estimated 18,067 individuals at the end of 2017. As the range State with the highest number of white rhinoceroses, it is worth noting that the white rhinoceros’ population in South Africa declined from 15,625 at the end of 2017, to 12 968 at the end of 2021.” This represents the lowest number of white rhinoceroses in South Africa since 2005.

Furthermore, according to a report [published](#) by the Wildlife Justice Commission (WJC) titled *Rhino Horn Trafficking as a Form of Transnational Organised Crime 2012-2021* rhino horn seizures have increased significantly in both number and in weight despite a reduction in poaching.

The amount of 7.5 tonnes of rhino horn that has been seized from the illegal trade globally during the past ten years, highlights the enormous scale of the issue.

Specific analysis of shipments of African rhino horns found the average shipment weight increased markedly after 2017, growing by 52% to 28.7 kg in the 2018–2019 period, and then by another 55% to 44.5kg in 2020–2021 period.

The continued expansion could indicate a larger involvement of transnational organised crime groups as the trade is monopolised by a few key networks with higher volumes of product moved to increase the profit margins per shipment.

In the period 2018 to 2020, South Africa was the range state most affected by the illegal rhino horn trade, in terms of the weight and number of specimens detected in illegal trade via seizures.

Failings in Rhino Horn Stockpile Management and Reporting: A Major Loophole for Illegal Trade



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For decades there have been warnings that the illegal supply of South African rhino horn from actual or potential horn stockpiles could exceed the supply from wild populations of rhino, particularly if appropriate stockpile measures were not put in place, and that existing deficiencies in rhino horn stockpile management present a major loophole for illegal trade.

Concomitantly, there have been numerous national and regional meetings, papers and publications in relation to rhino horn stockpile management minimum management and best practice. Despite this, it remains fair to argue in the South African context , as was stated back in

a [2002 Rhino Horn Stockpile Management Report](#) from the SADC Regional Programme for Rhino Conservation, that “currently, one of the greatest potentials for supplying rhino horn to illegal trade chains lies within existing and potential horn stocks”.

Also, in 2002, at a meeting of the IUCN/SSC African Rhino Specialist Group, it was agreed that **before** any sensible debate about South Africa’s possible proposal to trade in rhino horn, the following action needs to be taken:

1. Adequate and standardise rhino stockpile management including the measuring, registration and security covering both government and private sectors.
2. Registration of all horn stockpiles in the country at provincial level to minimise the potential of illegal trade and to allow equal trade opportunities for both private and government sectors.
3. Combining provincial registers into a central national stockpile database.
4. Incorporating rhino horn registration into national legislation and policy.

A stakeholder workshop that was held in 2004 was attended by government officials directly responsible for managing all the largest horn stockpiles in Africa, including South Africa. Representatives from Provincial conservation agencies KwaZulu Natal, Limpopo, Mpumalanga, North West Parks and Tourism Board and the Kruger National Park attended the workshop. A [comprehensive document](#) published by TRAFFIC after the workshop which contained recommended minimum standards for rhino horn stockpile management. Precise, detailed recommended practices for stockpile management were addressed. The document emphasized that most important part of rhino horn stockpile management is the registration process, to ensure that all related information is accurately recorded and, more importantly, to help minimize the likelihood of horns not reaching the final strong room destination. In this way, the importance of two key aspects of registration cannot be understated: an auditable paper trail and the use of comprehensive registers.

It was stressed that the maintenance of the main stockpiles should be centralised at national level. Furthermore, it was recommended that an electronic database should be implemented for all rhino horn stockpiles greater than 50 horns in size and/or growing at a rate of more than ten horns annually.

Compliance by both government and the private sector with rhino horn registration requirements was flagged as one of the greatest challenges to effective horn stockpile management, particularly in South Africa. Discrepancies in registered horn data was also highlighted with expected rhino horn stockpile quantities not matching officially registered volumes.

It was also recommended that every rhino range State should have a *policy* and/or *internal directives* covering rhino horn management (perhaps in conjunction with elephant ivory stockpile management). These should include a background, definitions, legal implications, minimum standards for the different aspects of stockpile management, clear roles and responsibilities, and procedures to follow from the time a rhino horn is found to final storage in a central strong room. In addition, clearly defined procedures should be in place for rhino horns originating from: state-owned land; confiscations; privately-owned rhinos; and trophy hunters.

South Africa also has obligations in Terms of CITES. A series of CITES resolutions and decisions have mandated the marking of specimens, recording of inventories, annual reporting obligations for a range of government-held stocks of various species, including rhino horn. In countries of concern with respect to illegal rhino horn trade, effective stockpile management is key with growing scrutiny and evaluation under the direction of the CITES Standing Committee. Failure to demonstrate competent stockpile management systems could prolong inclusion in remedial CITES oversight processes and may possibly lead to additional interventions as well.

In terms of CITES [Resolution Conf 9.14](#) (Rev CoP19), States Parties were urged to adopt and implement comprehensive legislation and enforcement controls relating to rhino horn, including taking comprehensive measures to collect and record data on rhino stockpiles in their countries and to report on this to the Secretariat. This would include stockpiles of privately-held rhino horn.

For example, the Resolution requires parties to use the detailed Form in the Annexure to the Resolution to collect information about rhino stockpiles (para 1(h)) and to declare stocks to the Secretariat annually (para 2(a)). This Resolution, the only one of its kind specific to rhino, clearly recognises the need for appropriate monitoring and counter-measures to try to minimise the risk of rhino horn stockpiles entering illegal trade. It also urges all Parties that have stocks of rhino horn to identify, mark, register and secure all such stocks and for all Parties to adopt and implement comprehensive legislation and enforcement controls, including internal trade restrictions and penalties aimed at reducing trade in rhino parts and derivatives and that law enforcement cooperation between States be increased to curtail illegal trade in rhino horns.



Limpopo Province © EMS Foundation 2013

At the Eighteenth meeting of the Conference of Parties in Geneva Switzerland held between 17 – 28 August 2019 the Secretariat submitted a [document](#) at the request of TRAFFIC. The document is entitled *Ensuring Effective Stockpile Management: A guidance Document*. The motivation for the inclusion of the document at CoP18 was to highlight the fact that leakage from wildlife

derivative stockpiles has been recognised as a major concern under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

The obvious question related to its obligations to CITES is whether the South African Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment have been providing accurate reports on state-held and privately-owned rhino horn stockpile to the CITES Secretariat. The EMS Foundation shares the increasing concern about the transparency, the oversight of the South African rhino stockpiles and has therefore once again requested data on the number of stockpiles and the amount of horn kept in stockpiles.

An official response to a January 2024 Promotion of Access to Information (PAIA) request to the national department by the EMS Foundation heightens these concerns as it reveals that the total weight and total number of rhino horns held in private stockpiles for the period 2012 to date is not in the possession of the national department. Furthermore, they apparently do not know what the current costs of maintaining government-held stockpiles are or the various environmental conditions they are stored in.

The subject matter of the PAIA request was most closely connected with a function that is exclusive to DFFE, namely, national control and oversight over use of, keeping and trade in specimens (including parts of) two species which are listed in terms of the national Threatened or Protected Species Regulations, 2007 and are also regulated by CITES and the CITES Regulations, 2010. This includes national control and oversight over the number of rhino horns in stockpiles, their provenance, identification and other important data. Moreover, in terms of the CITES Regulations, Minister Creecy is the National Management Authority for CITES in South Africa, responsible for implementing the Convention in South Africa. The Minister also answers [questions](#) in the South Africa Parliament in relation to rhino horn stockpiles and she is the issuing authority for all permits relating to the selling/ donating/ buying/ receiving of rhino horns. In addition, in a Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment presentation to Parliament in 2021 it was stated that: "To date, the following legislative areas have been addressed/ strengthened: marking requirements; compulsory DNA collection and analysis; and implementation of a national database for the recording of markings, linked with a national auditing process.

Among many other policy actions relating to rhino horn, in 2014 the national department published a [National Strategy for the Safety and Security of Rhinoceros Populations in South Africa](#). It was stated that this Strategy had been necessitated by a drastic increase in the number of incidents of rhino poaching in the country and the continued leakage of certain rhino horn stocks into the international illegal trade. The Strategy confirmed that from 2008 onwards rhino poaching had escalated at an alarming rate as had the leakage of both legal and illegal horns held in the various private and government stockpiles into illegal international markets with no indication of decreasing and that this "has raised concern with conservation bodies, private landowners and attracted international attention including media coverage worldwide, and increased the focus on South Africa at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES)." The Strategy also identified the development of "a database for all crime related information in respect of any activities impacting on rhino populations, rhino horns and associated by-products in South Africa" and integrating "the above database with applied scientific research data, including rhino

population census statistics and estimates for public and private land, surveys, monitoring reports or other data related to rhino population, horns or associated derivatives” as two activities which were necessary to implement the strategy.

Key to the implementation of the above Strategy was the [National Integrated Strategy to Combat Wildlife Trafficking](#) (NISCWT). However, although it was also developed in 2014, it was never signed by all the various government departments and to all intents and purposes only came into effect in May 2023.

The intention of NISCWT is to increase capacity and the effectiveness and coordination of intelligence and analysis on wildlife trafficking. The document speaks to the fact that the South African government needs to consolidate and increase wildlife compliance and enforcement regarding the combating of wildlife trafficking in South Africa. This would include consolidation of all law enforcement investigations and intelligence initiatives to significantly reduce the risk of wildlife-related corruption (including government officials involved with the illegal trafficking of rhino horn from government stockpiles).

Whilst this Strategy is paved with good intentions, it is clear, that government-based entities who are meant to fight wildlife trafficking have structural and operational limitations. They are not properly equipped and have not been provided with the necessary structural and operational independence, resources and analytical skills to cohesively give effect to this Strategy and to deliver effectively and efficiently. State Capture has hollowed out law enforcement entities in South Africa and the crisis of corruption continues with impunity. According to the latest (2023) [Corruption Perceptions Index](#), South Africa scored 41 – two points below its 2022 score, below the global average of 43 and the lowest score the country has ever received. South Africa falls into the category of “flawed democracies”. The illegal wildlife trade in South Africa cannot be divorced, from the urgent need to reform the criminal justice administration more generally. For the foreseeable future this Strategy is therefore likely to have very limited applicability in practice.

It is clear, that despite several workshops and the development of various strategy documents and action plans in relation to the trade in rhino body parts, including plans to improve the monitoring of rhino horn stockpiles and mitigate the escalation of the illegal trade in rhino horns, many of the key recommendations have not been implemented and, given South Africa’s current political milieu, are unlikely to be effectively implemented.

Within this context, as outlined above, it is entirely obvious that the South African rhino horn stockpiles represent a major risk for the effective combat of the illegal trade of rhino horn. Furthermore, rhino horn stockpiles are growing in South Africa, as dehorning has become the norm. Even the Kruger National Park adopted a policy of dehorning their last remaining rhinos in 2019.

South African Legal Rhino Horn Stockpiles Fuelling Illegal Trade

South African government-owned stockpiles of rhino horns consist of horns from rhinos who have died naturally or those who have been killed illegally, and from horns that have been harvested in State owned wildlife reserves and from seizures from law enforcement operations.

Private South African citizens who own rhino are legally allowed to stockpile rhino horn from dehorning procedures and from carcasses of rhino who have died naturally, under strict conditions.

Since 2016, at least 974kg of rhino horn seized in 11 incidents [were confirmed](#) as origination from the theft or illegal sale of horns from legal stockpiles, including both privately-owned and government-owned stockpiles in South Africa. These incidents represent 18% of all rhino horns seized during the period 2016-2021, three high profile rhino horn seizure examples are referred to in this Report:

John Hume Rhino Horn Seizure

On the 13th of April 2020 Clive John Melville, a relative of John Hume, and Petrus Stephanus Steyn pleaded guilty to charges of possession and transport of 181 rhino horns without the necessary permits, the horns were reportedly destined for South East Asian markets. Melville also pleaded guilty to forgery for preparing a document that purported to give him permission to possess and or transport the horns on behalf of the buyer, Allan Rossouw.

John Hume has called off court action to recover the 181 rhino horns seized by law enforcement officials, which he insists are his rightful property. Hume's application in the North Gauteng High Court in Pretoria to the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation (THE HAWKS) for the return of 181 rhinoceros horns valued at approximately R10 million [failed](#) and was dismissed with costs.

[According](#) to Ulrich Roux, an attorney acting for John Hume, they have a written undertaking from the National Prosecuting Authority as well as the HAWKS that the horns are in safe custody, as they are exhibits in on-going investigations.

An article entitled: *Controversial Rhino Breeder Temporarily Calls Off Court Action to Recover Rhino Horns Seized by Law Enforcement Officials* [argues](#) that the plea and sentence agreement states how this type of offence is very prevalent in South Africa. "While it is true that the horns in question were harvested legally the circumstances nevertheless show that criminals will go to great lengths to satisfy the bizarre demand for rhino horn due to the black market value thereof. The high number of horns involved in this instance and consequently the high potential value thereof is enormous, even if did not materialise, due to the efforts of the police."

CITES has [reported](#) this an illegal sale from a private stockpile.

Dawie Groenewald and Schalk Steyn Rhino Horn Seizure

Dawie Groenewald and Schalk Steyn were apprehended in possession of 19 rhino horns with an estimated value of R2.6 million in July 2021 while allegedly transporting 19 rhino horn in two vehicles. Following consultation between the defence and the investigating officer [the court ruled](#) that the accused could submit their affidavits at the police station “due to the difficult situation that we all find ourselves under.” They were released on R50 000.00 bail each shortly after their arrest.

Additionally, according to [intelligence](#) received, the horns originated from a government stockpile and were supplied to Dawie Groenewald by a corrupt conservation official.

South African Microchipped Rhino Horn Seized in China

The [largest](#) rhino horn seizure made outside South Africa in the past thirty years occurred when China Customs Anti-Smuggling Bureau seized 245 kilograms of rhino horn from a ship off the coast of Southeast China in July 2019.

70 of the 178 pieces of rhino horn from which microchip data was retrieved originated in South Africa.

On 16th of September 2022 Mr A G Whitfield of the Democratic Alliance party addressed [questions](#) to the Minister of Police in the National Assembly about the investigation into the origin of these 70 pieces of rhino horn. The official response was that the matter is being investigated by the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation in collaboration with other stakeholders, that no arrests had been made.

Domestic Rhino Horn Trade Regulations – an Official Response, 2020

Albi Modise, a spokesperson for the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, [said](#) that there have been cases where criminals have used the legal trade to gain access to horn. *“This was anticipated and the legal trade is, therefore being closely investigated. When necessary, investigations are initiated into illegal activities. A number of investigations are underway in relation to the illegal activities that have been detected. As soon as we detect the abuse of the system the permit conditions were amended for the buying and selling of rhino horn. Additional steps were also incorporated into the review of applications for such permits, which involves a more detailed evaluation of the potential buyers and sellers.”*



UN Office on Drugs & Crime
@UNODC

In this wildlife crime case, UNODC supported China Customs with a rhino horn microchip scanner, which opened new lines of investigation. UNODC also helped South Africa and China share cross border data and share information. [#EndWildlifeCrime](#)



On the 3rd June 2020 Minister Barbara Creecy [published](#) new regulations relating to the trade in rhinoceros horn. These regulatory measures apply to all sub-species of black rhino found in South Africa, including the Eastern black rhino and the white rhino. They provide for clear information on the requirements that must be complied with, and the information that must be submitted when applying for a permit to buy or sell rhino horn.

This includes information of the marking of the rhino horn, the size of each, a certificate as proof of the DNA analysis and a clear photograph of the rhino horn.

An inspection must also be done by the issuing authority to verify the information provided before issuing the permit. Additionally, all the information provided must be recorded on the national database.

The requirements for the selling or buying of rhino horn through an auction, the sale of rhino horn on behalf of the owner of the horns, and the export or re-export of the horn are also stipulated.

Official Government Position on the Intensive Breeding of Rhino for Commercial Purposes

An Advisory Committee known as the High-Level Panel of Experts (HLP) was appointed by Minister Barbara Creecy on the 10th October 2019 to review the policies, legislation and practices associated with the management, breeding, hunting, trade and handling of elephant, lion, leopard and rhinoceros.

The Chairperson of the High-Level Panel, Ms Pam Yako, [said](#) in a parliamentary committee meeting held in November 2020, “the reason for the appointment of the panel was because, although South Africa has an excellent reputation as global leader in conservation, especially in respect of iconic species like elephant, lion, leopard and rhinoceros, there is still significant level of public concern around the policies, legislation and practices associated with these species especially in terms of animal welfare and wellbeing.”

The [vision](#) of the High Level Panel Experts was revealed in a report published in December 2020, which included “*a secured, restored and rewilded natural landscapes with thriving populations of elephant, lion, rhino and leopard as indicators for a vibrant, responsible, inclusive transformed and sustainable wildlife sector.*”

In general, the vision and language of the High Level Panel of Experts Report marked a shift from apartheid-era exclusive ownership and use of wildlife to a more inclusive and transformative approach that acknowledges community stewardship of conservation and the sentience and welfare of animals. The High Level Panel of Experts majority finding was that the intensive breeding of rhinos (and lions) was detrimental to the image of South Africa as a prime tourist destination.

In September 2023 The Department Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment published the [draft Policy Position on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Elephant, Lion, Leopard and Rhinoceros. The draft policy position](#) focused on correcting unsustainable practises, promoting

conservation and sustainable use of the five species and providing policy direction for international commercial trade. The policy objectives although supporting the phasing out the domestication and intensification of management of rhinos did not specifically state that South Africa does not intend to permit international trade in rhino horn and elephant ivory – thereby leaving the door wide open. Indeed, the draft policy includes the following statements: *“South Africa will work with range states to support a proposal for international commercial trade in rhinoceros horn from protected wild rhinoceros, for conservation purposes, when conditions become favourable”*, and *“consider international commercial elephant ivory trade only when conditions become favourable.”* The language is ambiguous. It could be interpreted as meaning that the South African government has decided to work actively towards enabling international trade in rhino horn and elephant ivory in the future, and will permit such trade as soon as the specified conditions are met.

CITES exists to ensure that international trade does not exacerbate the conservation status of endangered species. It provides for bans and restrictions to be imposed on international trade in on various species and their body parts in situations where it is apparent that international trade is harmful. The fact that a particular type of trade in wildlife of their body parts may be permissible under CITES does not establish any obligation on a state that is a party to CITES to permit that trade. In other words, even if some international trade in rhino horn from South Africa were permissible under CITES, this does not mean that the South African government is under an obligation to permit such a trade.³ Consequently, it is important to consider not only whether or not international trade in rhino horn is permissible under CITES, but also whether or not it is desirable.

A decision to permit even a limited international trade in rhino horn (whether as trophies or otherwise) is highly likely to be challenged in court. Such a decision would be susceptible of being reviewed on various grounds. These might include:

- a failure to take reasonable measures to promote conservation in breach of section 24 of the Constitution and the duties of the State under NEMA and that National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act to act as trustee of the environmental and biological diversity;
- irrationality and unreasonableness;
- a failure to apply the principles in section 2 of NEMA, in particular the principle in section 2(4)(a)(vii) “that a risk averse and cautious approach is applied, which takes into account the limits of current knowledge about the consequences of decisions and actions”.

South Africa Formulates its Pre-Requisites for International Rhino Horn Trade

The 2015 [Committee of Inquiry](#) on the feasibility of rhino horn trade was tasked with, inter alia, investigating the feasibility of South Africa tabling a proposal for a trade in rhino horn, or not at the 17th Conference of Parties (CoP17) on the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora in 2016.

³ This is supported by the environmental management principle in section 2(4)(n) of the National Environmental Management Act (“NEMA”) which states that “Global and international responsibilities relating to the environment must be discharged in the national interest.”

The [Summary Report](#) confirmed that five key areas were identified that required interventions. These interventions are needed to address wildlife crime and enhance government's ability to conserve rhino in their natural habitat, and increase the opportunities to realise benefits associated with successful conservation.

As per the Inquiry's Recommendations there are five minimum requirements that must be met before South Africa can resume trade in rhino horn are:

Security (Law Enforcement)

- Integrated national law enforcement strategy, led by the SAPS, adopted, funded and included in the strategic plans of all relevant departments / entities.
- Significantly enhanced law enforcement capacity to counter transnational organised crime, including wildlife trafficking.
- Review of existing Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with other countries to ensure they provide for enhanced law enforcement cooperation and joint investigations by the relevant authorities.

Community Empowerment

- Functional municipalities around key protected areas to provide water, waste, sanitation, energy, roads, transport, education and health services through joint engagement by communities and conservation agencies with all relevant government departments.
 - Champion to be appointed to oversee Community Empowerment, in a permanent position with multi-departmental influence and funding, to develop and implement a Community Empowerment plan addressing these requirements which acknowledges past errors associated with protected area policies;
 - Effective two-way channels of engagement to operate between communities and protected area management structures, including the private sector and government agencies, with community involvement at management and Board level;
 - Increased access to education and capacity building opportunities in these communities, specifically through a targeted Mentorship Programme to provide qualifications and develop advanced skills in conservation and protected area management for community members and entry into protected area management opportunities;
 - Opportunities for alternative economic development are supported in these communities in parallel with capacity building in financial management and business development skills;
 - Sound financial management policies and practices are established within communities and municipalities to enable equitable fund distribution methods are implemented to disperse income from protected areas;
 - Effective governance structures are developed within communities so they are
-

empowered to hold structures accountable and prevent corruption and elite capture of benefits, including proven mechanism(s) for resolving conflicts between Traditional Authorities (TAs) and Community Property Associations (CPAs);

- A National review is undertaken within the Community Empowerment Plan to ensure better alignment and implementation of community empowerment policies and projects between National, Provincial, Municipal, local and community levels;
- Communities have ownership of conservation initiatives with decision-making powers and authority to equitably access benefits as part of sustainable livelihood initiatives.

Biological Management

- Approved biodiversity management plans for black and white rhino published in government gazette for implementation.
- Range States action plan aimed at facilitating cooperation and collaboration to conserve rhino within its natural range (collective plan).
- Bilateral engagements with key range States relating to rhino management.
- Resources to implement management plan/s.
- Implementation of management plans.
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of management plans.

Responsive Legislative Provisions and Effective Implementation

- Existing legislation used optimally to address all aspects of illegal trade (e.g. poaching, organized crime, trafficking, illegal possession of weapons, money laundering).
 - Legislation (environmental legislation and others) reviewed and revised to address gaps / emerging issues – this should include appropriate offences, bail aspects, penalties, enabling provisions and matters relating to foreign nationals involved in poaching and illegal trade (including gaps associated with possible trade models, if trade is an option).
 - Incentives for rhino conservation / ownership explored and developed.
 - Legislative mandates relating to intensive breeding of rhino clarified and legislative measures developed and implemented to effectively regulate all aspects relating to the activity (applicable to other species as well).
 - International engagements with range, transit and consumer States regarding legislative provisions to address illegal wildlife trade.
 - Integrated regulatory framework, including a permit system that facilitates monitoring of legal activities involving rhino and rhino horn or other products.
 - Rhino horn stockpiles managed and audited as required in terms of legislative provisions.
 - Review of international law and relevant multilateral agreements to determine whether there are any mechanisms that can be used to support actions against illegal rhino trade from South Africa.
-

Demand Management/Reduction

- Continued interactions with consumers and information-gathering mechanisms within known consumer and range states to better understand consumer patterns, attitudes and behaviour. (The institutional arrangements underpinning different trade models can make it easier for some models to provide insights into consumer behaviour than others. In the absence of legal trade models that facilitate information gathering, the understanding of consumer attitudes and behavior will require regular, well-constructed and executed studies in consumer markets and remain difficult given the illegal nature of the banned trade.)
- Monitoring system to be developed and implemented to gather information relating to prices paid to poachers and the quantity of horn traded.

CITES CoP19 Discussions And Proposals On The Rhino Horn Trade And Hunting Of Rhino

The 19th Conference of the Parties (CoP19) to Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) took place in Panama City in Panama from the 14th to the 25th November 2022.

The international trade in rhino horn was banned by CITES in 1977, but proposed amendments to this ban are regularly raised at CITES conferences. In 2022 these included the following proposals which could weaken protections for rhino:

- The [proposal](#) to transfer Namibia's Southern white rhino from Appendix I to Appendix II for the exclusive purpose of allowing international trade in live animals for in-situ conservation and hunting trophies
- The [proposal](#) to permit regulated legal trade in Eswatini's Southern White rhinos and their products, including horn and derivatives, this proposal was very similar to the proposals submitted to CoP17 and CoP18 which CITES parties rejected.

The proposal to downgrade the status of southern white rhino from Appendix I to Appendix II was [accepted](#) at the 19th Conference of the Parties after it received 83 votes in favour 31 against it and 13 abstentions. The amendment restricted the downgrading to live animals, for in situ conservation purposes only. The initial proposal also sought the export of hunting trophies.

The Parties [voted](#) on Eswatini's proposals with 15 in favour, 85 against and 26 abstentions.

An [important information document](#) was submitted by the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland on behalf of the Wildlife Justice Commission and the World Wide Fund for Nature in relation to agenda item 75 at CoP19.

The document presents the Executive Summary of Rhino Horn Trafficking as a Form of Transnational Organised Crime 2012 – 2021: 2022 Global Treat Assessment a comprehensive analysis of rhino horn trafficking during the decade from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2021.

The threat assessment was compiled from the analysis of 674 rhino horn seizure incidents that occurred globally during this decade, in addition to seven years of criminal intelligence and findings from the Wildlife Justice commission investigation into rhino horn trafficking conducted since 2005, and other open-source research.

Theft from Government Rhino Horn Stockpile, 2023

On the 26th June 2023 thieves broke into the offices of the provincial agency responsible for wildlife conservation and management in North West Province, the North West Parks Board, and [stole 51 rhino horns](#). Curiously, the South African Police Service arrived at the crime scene at Heritage House at Cookes Lake eight hours after the incident was reported.

Thieves broke into the main vault using keys, at the agency's security patrolled offices between 1.30am and 2.15am after they had disabled the security alarms and cameras. The total weight of the horns was estimated between 70 and 90 kilograms.

On the 2nd of August 2023 the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee Meeting on Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment [heard](#) that four suspects had been arrested following the theft of 51 rhino horns from a stockpile facility in Mahikeng in the North West Province in July 2023. The horns with an estimated value of R9 million have not been recovered.

However, Lieutenant Tinyiko Mathebula [announced](#) the five vehicles suspected to have been used in commission of the crime, a Range Rover, Land Rover, BMW, Nissan X-Trail and Honda Civic were confiscated for further investigation, which suggests that the South African Police Services are in possession of more information than what they are willing to share at present.

The 2021 EMS Foundation Report [Where Have All the Rhinos Gone?](#) lists numerous thefts from state owned and privately owned rhino stockpiles.

On the 7th November 2023, the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee members expressed their concern over the lack of an internal investigation into the rhino horn theft and expressed their disappointment at the slow progress in the prosecution of most wildlife cases.

Lieutenant General Godfrey Lebeya, National Head, Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation [was at the meeting](#), he said that wildlife trafficking was a national priority crime that the Environmental Protected Resources Section investigated under the Component: Serious Organised Crime Investigations in the CPCI. There are a total of 78 wildlife trafficking cases across all provinces that were on the court roll.

He confirmed that the case of the [State VS Groenewald](#) where the accused persons were all arrested in 2010, released on bail and that the matter had been enrolled for 14 years. The case had now been set down for trial, and 185 witnesses would be required to testify and that it was common cause that the matter would be enrolled for an extended period. The matter had been transferred to the High Court Division of Limpopo for further handling. The matter was postponed to 9th of February 2024 for first appearance and that trial date was stipulated as 7th October to 1st November 2024 by the Judge.

Closure of World's Largest Rhino Captive Breeding and Rhino Horn Harvesting Facility

In 1992 John Hume, a property developer, purchased a property called Mauricedale Game Farm situated in Hectorspruit, in Mpumalanga Province. In 2009 he relocated the intensive rhino breeding operation to a farm near Klerksdorp in the North West Province where he formally registered a Captive Breeding Facility for Southern White Rhinos. This operation was originally known as Buffalo Dream Ranch, and later renamed the Platinum Rhino Project.

It is interesting to note that SANParks was directly involved with the start-up of this breeding operation. Amongst other, John Hume purchased ninety rhino [from SANParks](#), a large number of which apparently died as a result of stress and unseasonably cold weather in 2013.

Six of the rhinos that survived ended up on the farm of Dawie Groenewald. According to an article [published](#) by Corruption Watch he is known as "The Butcher" and is allegedly the mastermind of South Africa's largest poaching syndicate.

John Hume intensively bred rhino and harvested their horn stockpiling with the fervent belief that the international trade in rhino horn would be legalised. By 2023 the so-called Platinum Rhino Project boasted a population of approximately 2000 white Rhino.

According to the [African Rhino Specialist Group](#) thriving African rhino populations play [key ecological roles](#) within the ecosystem, within which their evolution depends on their genetic health, and not just on population numbers.

Domestic Trade in Rhino Horn

John Hume's Masterplan, and that of other private rhino breeders - to intensively breed rhino for maximum harvesting and to legalise the international trade in rhino horn - was dealt an eight-year setback when the national moratorium on the domestic trade of rhino horn, derivative or product was put into effect on the 13th February 2009 by the then Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Marthinus van Scalkwyk.

This moratorium, which was put in place in terms of section 5792 of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 10 of 2004 (NEMBA), occurred at a similar time to John Hume's [registration](#) of his intensive white rhino breeding facility.

Thus began a legal process that culminated on the 5th of April 2017 when the Constitutional Court [handed down an order](#) dismissing the Department of the Environment's Appeal against the 2015 order of the High Court which set aside the national moratorium on the domestic trade in individual rhino horns or any derivative or product thereof. The court decision, nullified the domestic rhino horn trade moratorium not on grounds of unconstitutionality, illegality, irrationality or unreasonableness, but on the ground of *lack of substantive due process in the determination and imposition of the moratorium*.⁴

The validity of the moratorium was originally contested in the North Gauteng High Court in 2012 by two private rhino owners, Johan Kruger and John Hume. John Hume stated that because

⁴ Collins, A., Cox, C. & Marire, J. On the judicial annulment of the 'domestic' trade moratorium in South African rhinoceros horn: a law and economics perspective. Eur J Law Econ 49, 361–372 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10657-020-09648-4>

he was the largest rhino breeder, the Minister was obliged to give him [personal notice of the moratorium](#) and that the failure to do so, rendered the moratorium reviewable and subject to be set aside. At the time he had 1124 rhino comprising predominately white rhino, but also including a relatively small number of black rhinos. According to the court documents, at the time of the imposition of the moratorium he was the lawful owner of 4000 kilograms or 4 tonnes of rhino horns obtained from lawfully dehorning his own rhinos.

On the 12th of June 2008, the Department [informed the Wildlife Forum](#), an exclusive forum of wildlife industry stakeholders, that a moratorium on domestic trade in horn was under consideration and that a draft notice would immediately be published for public participation. The second applicant, the Wild Game Ranching Association of South Africa (which later became Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA), of which Hume and Kruger were also members, was also consulted.

The legal argument was that the 2009 moratorium was not published by the Minister in a national newspaper, as is required by the public participation process in sections 99 and 100 of NEMBA. (One has to ask how and why the Minister and her Department could make such an obvious mis-step in such a familiar and much used rudimentary procedure).

The High Court found that the Minister did not fully comply with the public consultation requirements of NEMBA and set aside the moratorium. Minister Edna Molewa applied to the High Court for leave to appeal. Thereafter the Minister sought leave to appeal in the Supreme Court of Appeal, which the court also dismissed, this resulted in the application for leave to appeal before the Constitutional Court.

According to organisation *WildAid*: "Dawie Groenewald has claimed to be the mastermind behind the court case. In an [interview with Bryan Christy for National Geographic](#), Groenewald stated that Johan Krüger's name was 'on the papers,' but that he was behind the plan. According to Christy, Groenewald and Krüger have been in the buffalo business together and they hunt together. Krüger's photograph has appeared in Groenewald's hunting brochures and Krüger's lawyer is also Groenewald's lawyer. Some in South Africa have speculated that, since many of the legal charges brought against Groenewald were based on domestic trade having been subject to a moratorium at the time, the prospect of having those charges dropped could be his motivation for bringing the case. In February 2017, while waiting for the final Constitutional Court decision, the DEA published its Draft Regulations for the Domestic Trade in Rhinoceros Horn, or a Part, Product or Derivative of Rhinoceros Horn. The draft contemplates legalizing domestic trade in rhino horn, which raises questions about the DEA's motivation for defending the moratorium so vigorously in three courts. The draft law also contemplates legalizing exports of rhino horn 'for personal purposes.' These draft regulations highlight an extremely worrying trend within the DEA, where the benefit of the doubt is almost always given to the private sector, despite the fact that, to a significant extent, it is plagued by corruption, greed and criminality."⁵

On the 22nd September 2010 eleven people accused of rhino poaching were granted bail in the Musina Magistrate's Court. One of the alleged masterminds of the poaching syndicate is [Dawie Groenewald](#). He was granted bail of a million rand but this was later reduced to the amount of R100 000.00. The accused were represented by four different legal teams. [20 rhino carcasses](#) were recovered from Dawie Groenewald's farm in Musina in the Limpopo province, where

5 See: <https://wildaid.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/WildAid-Failure-to-Prosecute-LR.pdf> and <https://www.conservationaction.co.za/failure-prosecute-mixed-messages-south-africa-can-single-handedly-lose-second-rhino-war/>

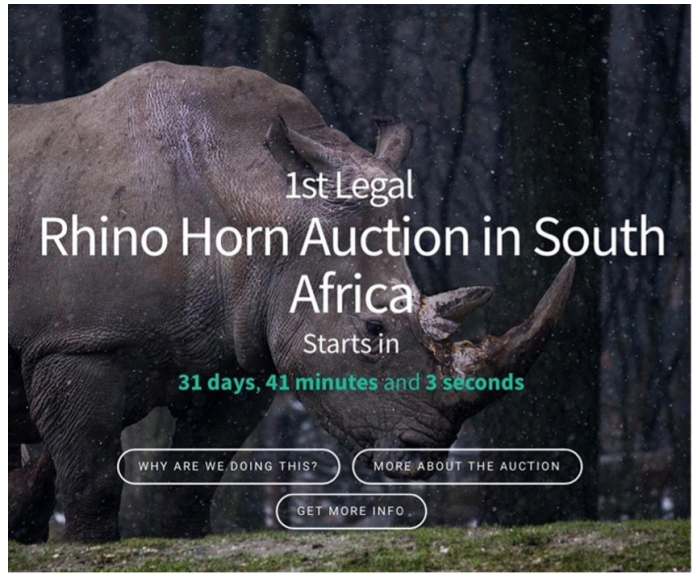
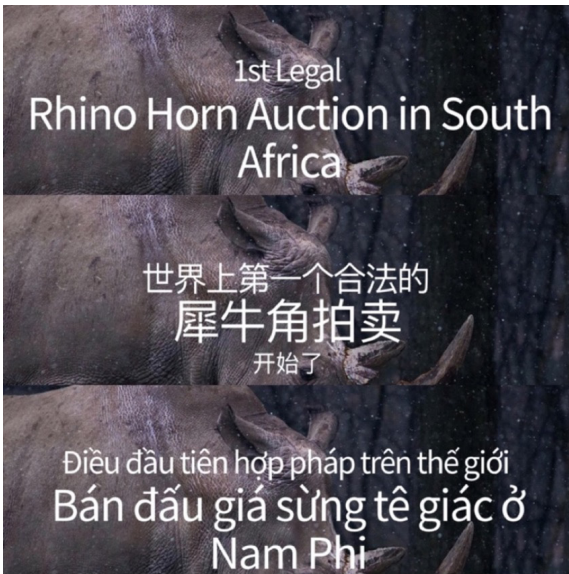
the rhino carcasses were buried. The accused were alleged to be part of a syndicate which operated around Polokwane, Modimolle and Musina and had allegedly been involved in rhino poaching and killing, the selling of horns and disposal of the carcasses.

John Hume's 500kg Rhino Horn Auction

It is widely acknowledged that there is no appetite for the use of rhino horn in South Africa. Inevitably rhino horn that is illegally obtained in South Africa ends up in Asia where there is a demand for rhino horn to be used in traditional medicine, or as a status symbol. As Collins *et al.* [argue](#), because the ultimate objective is to sell the horns for a higher return elsewhere and crucially beyond South Africa's borders, local/domestic demand is in fact speculative demand.

In August 2017, after the Constitutional Court nullified the 2009 moratorium on the domestic trade in rhino horn, John Hume organised an online rhino horn auction. Economists feared the [risks](#) associated with the auction were that there would be a stimulation for the demand of rhino horn and this would lead to increased poaching. [Billed](#) as the world's first "legal horn auction", the three-day online auction was organised ostensibly for intensive rhino farmer, John Hume, to sell 264 rhino horns, from his nearly six-ton stockpile, to South African citizens. Van's Auctioneers confirmed that Hume would offer 500kg of rhino horn in 250 separate lots – mainly sets of front and back horns. Interestingly, the auction site published details in English, Vietnamese and Chinese.

The South African government insisted that the necessary protections were in place to prevent rhino horn from leaking onto the black market. Minister Molewa [noted](#) the North Gauteng High Court ruling relating to the issuance of a permit for the selling of rhino horn to John Hume, saying: "The Department places value on the need to monitor the movement of horns, and for this reason systems are in place to enable us to do that". Domestic trade in rhino horn is subject to the issuance of the relevant permits in terms of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 2004 (Act No 10 of 2004) (NEMBA) its regulations and applicable provincial legislation.



Rhino Horn Auction
@HornAuction

You don't need a permit to register for and take part in the Rhino Horn Online Auction. You can apply for a permit after the auction.

**Register Now,
Online Bidding Start on
Wednesday 23 August
at 14:00**

Rhino Horn Auction
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You do not need a permit to register for and take part in the Online Rhino Horn Auction on Wednesday. You can apply for a permit after the auction. Visit our website now to register and become one of the first legal buyers in SA!

**Register Now,
Online Bidding
Start on
Wednesday
23 August at
14:00**
www.rhinohornauction.com

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Rhino Horn Auction's Post



Rhino Horn Auction's Post



The online auction attracted [fewer buyers](#) than anticipated. According to an interview with the [Times](#) in London, Hume blamed the strict rules for the sale and licensing of rhino horn in South Africa for the poor sales.

South African Police Intercept and Seize 181 Rhino Horns Belonging to John Hume in Illegal Sale

John Hume was [reported](#) to have suffered another financial set-back when the Pretoria High Court dismissed his attempt to regain control of the 181 rhino horns which were confiscated by the South African Police Services in 2019.

Stephanus Steyn and Clive Melville, a relative of Hume, were arrested for transporting 181 rhino horns without a permit. The men entered a plea and sentence agreement and were duly found guilty.

Hume's argument was that he had obtained a permit authorising the sale of the 181 rhino horns to Alan Rossouw, who sent Steyn and Melville to collect the horns. Hume claimed that he had never met Rossouw, a claim that the judge dismissed outright: "It is astounding that a self-professed businessman would voluntarily release valuable assets, such as rhino horns, from his control and custody, entrust them to a potential buyer who he has never personally met for inspection in the hope that the potential buyer becomes the buyer of the 181 horns at a reason price to be agreed".

Counsel for the HAWKS and a Senior Police Investigating Officer [told the court](#) that Rossouw never intended to buy the horns and had merely agreed to have the sale permit registered in his name in exchange for cash. "This and other strange features of the transaction between Hume and Roussouw show not only a sham transaction to disguise the illegal sale of the 181 horns but they show Hume's complicity. It was submitted that, in the circumstances, the 181 horns should not be returned to Hume before he has explained his involvement and his conduct and that the proper forum for this is not a civil court, but the criminal court" said Judge SK Hassim.

Hume Attempts to Sell Mauricedale Property

Three months after the successful HAWKS operation which involved the interception and arrest of the two suspects transporting 181 rhino horns belonging to John Hume, in August 2019, the pro-trade True Green Alliance [published](#) an article stating that John Hume was forced to sell this property in a final and desperate attempt to raise funds to secure the future of his 1 732 rhino.

According to the article the estimated value of this 6600-hectare property was between R490 and R523 million in 2008. Previous attempts to sell the property in Mpumalanga Province for R400 million have been unsuccessful. The property is located fifteen kilometres away from the Kruger National Park and include a 76-bed lodge and eight additional cottages.

The property is still for sale and is up for [auction](#) in March 2024.

On the Verge of Bankruptcy: The Failure of the Platinum Rhino Project

John Hume placed the entire rhino breeding operation [on auction](#) on Wednesday 26th April 2023. John Hume received no bids on the auction for the Platinum Rhino Project which included the white rhinos and the entire 21000-hectare farm in North West Province with an asking price of \$10 million.



PLATINUM RHINO CONSERVATION

AS AT 28.04.2023 AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE

WHITE RHINO

ADULT FEMALES: - 72 Months and above	694
ADULT MALES: - 72 Months and above	505
YOUNG ADULT FEMALES: - 55 - 71 Months	57
SUB FEMALES: - 31 - 54 Months	111
SUB MALES: - 31 - 71 Months	224
JUV FEMALES: - 21 - 30 Months	96
JUV MALES: - 21 - 30 Months	98
CALVES BORN (F): - 0 - 20 Months	93
CALVES BORN (M): - 0 - 20 Months	121
TOTAL	1999

* Subject to Change

BUFFALO

COWS	76
BULLS	20
CALF FEMALE	58
CALF MALE	61
TOTAL	215

* Subject to Change

SABLE

BREEDING COWS	45
BULLS	16
CALF FEMALE	24
CALF MALE	27
TOTAL	112

* Subject to Change

PLAINS GAME & OTHER

LLAMA	1
BLESBOK	58
SPRINGBOK	37
LETCHWE	25
ZEBRA	7
ELAND	45
GEMSBOK	22
RED HARTEBEEST	41
TSESSEBE	18
GIRAFFE	11
NYALA	5
IMPALA	35
FALLOW DEER	33
HIPPO	5
HORSES	6
SHEEP & GOAT	323
PIGS	100
CATTLE	156

* Subject to Change

* Subject to Change

Due to natural births, the above numbers may change & due to natural mortalities, the above numbers may change



Instead, a private deal between Platinum Rhino Project and [African Parks](#), the non-profit organisation, acquired the farm and the white rhino and other wild animals. African Parks is a Johannesburg based non-profit organisation that manages twenty-two protected areas in partnership with twelve governments across Africa.

On the 4th September 2023, Africa Parks announced that they were going to purchase John Hume's Buffalo Dream Ranch and the 2000 rhino that live there. The organisation is planning to rewild the rhino over a ten-year period to translocate the rhino to multiple well-managed protected areas across Africa. Conservation organisations called this deal one of the most positive outcomes that could have arisen from this situation however the challenge of rewilding the rhinos are incredibly daunting.

African Parks a conservation NGO manages 22 protected areas in partnership with 12 governments in Africa and they say they have no intention of being the owner of a captive breeding operation and plans to rewild the rhino over a ten- year period. It has updated their website to include a menu titled [Rewilding 2000 Rhino](#). *"After conducting a thorough due diligence and with the support of the South African Government, as well as having secured emergency funding to make the transaction possible, African Parks agreed to purchase the farm and all 2000 rhino. African Parks has one clear objective: to rewild these rhinos over the next ten years to well-managed and secure areas, establishing or supplementing strategic populations, thereby de-risking the future of the species."*

Importantly the website information clarifies that the breeding programme will be phased out and the project will end once all the rhino are released into the wild. *"Africa Parks had no intention of being the owner of a captive rhino breeding operation with 2000 rhino however we fully recognise the moral imperative of finding a solution for these animals so that they can once again play their integral role in fully functioning ecosystems"*.

Trafficking, Arrests, Seizures and Assassinations: What Next for South African Rhinos

For a detailed report see [Appendix 1](#) of this Report.

Pro Rhino Horn Trader Arrest, December 2023

According to an article [published](#) by Al Jazeera in November 2021, Derek Lewitton bought a 3000 hectare rhino reserve in Limpopo Province of South Africa in 2017, the article also states that [Black Rock Rhino Conservation](#) rhino population was 200.

According to the Black Rhino Conservation [website](#) Lewitton is the author of several papers defining the options for the legal trade in rhino horn and has served in a voluntary capacity as the legal advisor and CITES expert for the [IWMC Wildlife Conservation Trust](#), a non-profit organisation that advocates for the sustainable use of wildlife resources.

Lewitton was also the guest speaker at the [African Wildlife Economy Institute Fireside Chats](#) which topics included *Promoting an Inclusive Wildlife Economy, Developing a Standard for Responsible and Sustainable Hunting, Leveraging the Value of Rhinos in South Africa and the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Lions*.

According to numerous local and international media reports, on 22nd December 2023 Derek Lewitton, a US citizen was arrested following a raid on his Harmony Gate Estate in Limpopo Province by the South African Police Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation units.

The dramatic descriptions published in media [reports](#) are reminiscent of the horrific alleged [findings at Dawie Groenewald's farm](#) Prachtig in Musina in 2010. Describing what he saw on Lewitton's property, Provincial Commissioner of Police, Major General Jan Scheepers said, "From the helicopter the place looked like a slaughterhouse, everywhere you looked, rhinos were lying there dead. Twenty-six rhino carcasses were allegedly found at Lewitton's farm. There were also 10 unmarked rhino horns in a safe, as well as seven allegedly illegal firearms and hundreds of rounds of ammunition."

On the 3rd January 2024 it was [reported](#) that Derek Lewitton would remain in custody until the 10th of January 2024 for a formal bail hearing.

An article [published](#) by Maroela Media contains information from a statement made by James Brackenbury, legal advisor to Lewitton, claiming that Mr Lewitton's reserve has been violently assaulted by poachers for months but the police have opted to pursue the victim of a crime with more vigour than the true perpetrators. Brackenbury also said "More recently, Mr Lewitton has supported private investigative efforts into a vast quantity of rhino horn which is reportedly missing from the government's own vault in Skukuza. His work and the testimony of security officers involved with the administration of the vault, indicated that as much as 50 tonnes of horn with a street value in excess of \$1 billion had disappeared without explanation since 2016."

2018 Norms and Standards for the Marking of Rhinos and Rhino Horns

The provisions of these [norms and standards](#) must be read alongside the provisions of the [Threatened or Protected Species \(TOPS\) Regulations](#).

These norms and standards relate to the marking of live rhinos and rhino horn and applies to all live rhino and all individual detached rhino horn whether in private or state possession.

All rhino irrespective of the purpose of the darting, that have not been marked with a microchip, or where the microchip is no longer detectable, must be marked by a microchip by the relevant issuing authority or veterinarian with one microchip behind the ear close to the base of the ear and one microchip in each of the horns, pertaining to horns that are more than 5cm in length.

The deaths of all rhino, irrespective of the cause of death or the theft of rhino horn must be reported to the issuing authority within 5 days of discovering the death of such rhino or such rhino horn.

If the owner of a rhino acquires a rhino horn from the rhino the owner must apply to the relevant issuing authority within 5 days of acquiring such rhino horn, to have such horn marked if it is 5cm or more in length, the following instances apply:

- Mortality of such rhino, irrespective of such mortality
- Dehorning of such rhino,
- Where such rhino has lost its horn in any other manner
- A person, other than the owner of the rhino, who is in possession of rhinoceros horn that is 5cm or more in length, irrespective of the weight of such rhino horn, must apply to the relevant issuing authority to have such horn marked.
- Specific measurements and detailed images must be recorded and supplied of the horn. The issuing officer, before supplying the permit must inspect the horn and the images and the measurements.
- The issuing authority must mark the rhino horn according to the aforementioned regulations.

CITES Declaration of Stocks of Rhino Horn January 2024

On the 4th of January 2024 CITES sent a [Notification to remind Parties](#) that according to the contents of [Resolution Conf. 9.14 \(Rev. CoP19\)](#) on the Conservation of and trade in African and Asian rhino contains, among other provisions, a recommendation urging all Parties that have stocks of rhino horn to identify, mark, register and secure such stocks and declare these to the Secretariat each year before 28 February, in a format to be defined by the Secretariat.

The Resolution also inter alia urges the Secretariat and other appropriate bodies, where possible, to assist Parties, that have stocks of rhino horn with the control of stocks, by providing them technical advice and relevant information.

Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP19) Conservation of and Trade in African and Asian Rhino

CITES Secretariat remains concerned that some rhino populations have continued to decline drastically and that four of the five species are threatened with extinction:

- Commending further measures taken by Parties to control and reduce use of rhino horn, especially Parties where use is part of a cultural tradition extending back many centuries.
 - Concluding that the above measures have not yet arrested the decline of most rhino populations.
 - Recognizing that the illegal trade in rhino horn is known to be a global law enforcement problem, extending beyond the range States and traditional consuming countries, but
-

that emphasis solely on law enforcement has failed to remove the threat to rhino.

- Noting the importance of well targeted strategies or programmes to reduce demand for illegally obtained rhino specimens, and the importance of implementing strategies or programmes to enhance community awareness of the economic, social and environmental impacts of illegal killing of rhino.
- Recognising the need to deploy the same tools and techniques as those used against other domestic and transnational organised crimes, provided for in the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organised Crime and the United Nations Convention Against Corruption, against the criminal groups involved in the illegal killing of rhino and the trafficking of rhino horns, and in particular against those individuals managing and organising these illegal activities.

Rhino Horn Stockpiles Do Not Serve a Conservation Purpose

Leakage from government and private rhino horn stockpiles is fuelling wildlife crime, killing rhinos and putting the lives of South Africans at risk.

There are very high costs associated with the storage of rhino horns, the content of this report and the comprehensive research report published by the [Wildlife Justice Commission](#) supported by the World Wildlife Fund, [presented](#) at CITES CoP19 in 2022 by the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland have raised serious questions about the mismanagement of these stockpiles in South Africa.

By stockpiling rhino horn the speculation that it has actual value is perpetuated as is the notion that rhino horn will be traded on the free market one day, when reality the trade of rhino horn has been banned since 1977 and for 47 years there has been no appetite to unban this trade hence the complete failure of the [Buffalo Dream Ranch](#) and others.

In depth [research](#) has proved that the illegal wildlife trade is fuelled by the rhino horn from state and privately owned stockpiles of rhino horn in South Africa. In turn the illegal trade continues to decimate the remaining rhino populations in Africa and Asia.

Our legitimate concerns are shared by countries with rhino populations, for instance on world rhino day in 2021 Assam, north eastern India, [burnt](#) 2623 rhino horns that had been stored in the treasuries. The horns were collected across Assam from rhinos that had either died of natural causes or horns seized from poachers. The purpose of the burn was to send a strong message to the world that Assam only values the horns on live rhino. "If we continue to keep the horns in our treasuries it sends the wrong message that we are protecting something valuable." The horns had undergone an elaborate process of verification and sampling during which the horns were cleaned and each was provided with a Unique Identification Number. Thereafter, samples were drilled out for studying genetic patterns, chemical composition and DNA patterns that would provide insight into the genetic regressions and migrating patterns of the rhino."

A few months before CoP17 was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, on April 30th 2016 Kenya's president Uhuru Kenyatta set fire to the largest stockpile of ivory and rhino horn in history, as a

statement of Kenya's political will to combat the current poaching crisis. 1.35 tonnes of rhino horn was [burnt](#), the strong message that Kenya's assets are not for sale. The burn took place at the Nairobi National Park. CITES Secretary General John Scanlon [said](#) the burn was an apt message by conservationists. "This is to draw attention to the illegal wildlife trade."

The United States of America, where large amounts of trafficked rhino horn have been intercepted over the years, has publicly destroyed confiscated rhino horn. The United States Fish and Wildlife Services and their partners have held events to crush and [burn](#) rhino horn and ivory. Capturing the world's attention these events create awareness of how important it is for consumers to be informed about wildlife products, especially those that may contribute to the poaching crisis. Torching confiscated rhino horn shows poachers and the black market that these illegal products are worthless.

Conclusion: South Africa Must Destroy its Rhino Horn Stockpiles

In 2009 Animal Rights Africa (ARA) published a special report, [Under Siege – Rhinoceros in South Africa](#). The content of the report consisted of collated information relating to the hunting, trade and illegal killing of rhino which revealed a lack of centralised statistics and data, an uncoordinated response from authorities, insufficient enforcement and resources to adequately protect South Africa's rhino population and a general way of thinking that promoted killing instead of protection and respect.

In a [letter](#) addressed to ARA on the 13th September 2009 the Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs stated that there was no need to impose a moratorium on rhino sales nor to investigate SANParks. The contents confirmed a government strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of wild populations of southern white rhino and that the rhino populations were increasing at a rate of 12% per annum. "The world's largest white rhino population numbering approximately 12000 is found in the Kruger National Park and this is proof of viable and present management practices. Therefore there is no need for a consultative process because of failed management policies."

The South African Hunters and Game Conservation Association responded to the media outcry after a number of white rhinos died when they were sold off by the Kruger National Park to private individuals, by issuing a [public statement](#). "The reason for the death of ten rhino has not been established beyond doubt but it certainly clouded the planned translocation of about 300 white rhinos from Kruger to private landowners. The decision was based on the excellent population growth of white rhino in the Kruger and the opportunity to send some genetic bearers to other parts of the country where they could become part of the metapopulation. Sustainable utilisation management means that intervention is sometimes necessary. As animals increase in numbers the pressure on the available habitat mounts and take-off (hunting) is often a much-needed management tool."

Despite all the assurances from SANParks, the Minister of the Environment and the hunting fraternity four years after the aforementioned Report was published it was [reported in the media](#) that South African trophy hunters were directly involved with the illegal killing of rhino in the Kruger National Park.

In the midst of the Mozambique/Kruger National Park trophy hunting scandal, so confident were SANParks of their rhino numbers that, in 2013, [260 Kruger National Park rhino](#) were sold to trophy hunters in Namibia and South Africa and to private South African breeding farms. 130 of the 260 rhinos sold died in the relocation process between 2009 and 2014. These rhinos were then replaced by the Kruger National Park as specified in the sales agreement. Included in this number were the 90 rhinos sold to John Hume. According to a 2018 [Oxpeckers report](#) there is no evidence as to the fate of the horns from the deceased rhinos.

Ten years after the Kruger National Park glibly sold rhino to trophy hunters, the devastating [rhino numbers](#) were published in SANParks Annual Report 2022/2023 which stated that the total rhino population in the Kruger National Park has declined by a further 16.2% from an estimated 2458 rhinos in 2021 to 2060 in 2022.

On the 7th August 2023, the Private Rhino Owners Association [stated](#) that there were approximately 8000 rhinos in private hands. This figure includes the 2000 rhino that John Hume once owned.

An update [published](#) by the South Africa government in the first six months of 2023 alleged that 231 rhinos were killed in South Africa. Forty-two rhinos were killed in the Kruger National Park and 143 killed in KwaZulu Natal.

The failure of John Hume to attract a single buyer or investor at the auction to sell Platinum Rhino Project re-emphasises the fact that farming rhinos to harvest their horns is not a viable business model, is not effectively monitored and increases the likelihood of leakage into the illegal market.

According to [official figures](#) provided to the EMS Foundation in 2019, more than 55% of rhino horns in South Africa are held in legal private stockpiles. It is logical that that the large stockpiles of rhino horn in South Africa play a role in illegal trafficking. Not only do legal stockpiles represent the largest potential supply of horns for exploitation in the illegal trade, but the ever-increasing privately held stockpiles significantly increases that potential.

Investigations conducted by the [Wildlife Justice Commission](#) show that criminal groups are routinely exploiting weaknesses and loopholes in stockpile management procedures to access harvested rhino horns for the illegal trade. *“Some Vietnamese traffickers operating in South Africa claim to buy their horns directly from private rhino breeders who arrange the shipments to go through OR Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg. They stated that contacting the farmers is “easy” and microchips can be destroyed by microwaving the horns for a few seconds. A major trafficker based in Malaysia who facilitates the transportation of rhino horn shipments from Africa to Asia, stated that his main supplier in South Africa is a “powerful white guy” who has a stockpile of around four tonnes of harvested horns. This supplier is also alleged to have access to poached horns and regularly sends mixed shipments of 20-40% poached horns with 60-80% harvested horns. Reported seizures...also demonstrate*

the presence of mixed shipments in the illegal trade. Joint shipments of illegally poached horn with legally harvested horns means diverting the latter into illegal trade is not a minor regulatory infringement but entrenched and organised criminality with connections to rhino poaching networks."

- More specifically, the key findings from the extensive data collected on rhino horn trafficking by the [Wildlife Justice Commission](#) for the period 2012 to 2021 reveal that:
- South Africa is one of six countries that is dominating rhino horn trafficking routes.
- South Africa is consistently implicated in rhino horn trafficking and the volume of horns seized in connection to South Africa has remained consistently high.
- Data from seizures during 2020-2021 show that South Africa became the most significant African exit point for large shipments and that there is a growing involvement of transnational organised crime groups in rhino horn trafficking.
- The consistency of the level of trafficking from South Africa could indicate the extent to which criminality and reoccurring corruption is embedded in the country, enabled by favourable operating conditions and law enforcement that has so far insufficiently dealt with the problem.
- Significant amounts of harvested horns from legal stockpiles are diverted into illegal trade and that seizure data alone, specifically for a ten-year period from 1 January 2012 to 31 December 2021, shows that it is probable that 33% of all rhino horns seized between 2016-2021 were either diverted or stolen from stockpiles or illegally.
- It is very possible that the supply into the illegal market from legal stockpiles has increased since the moratorium on the domestic trade of rhino horn in South Africa was lifted in 2017.

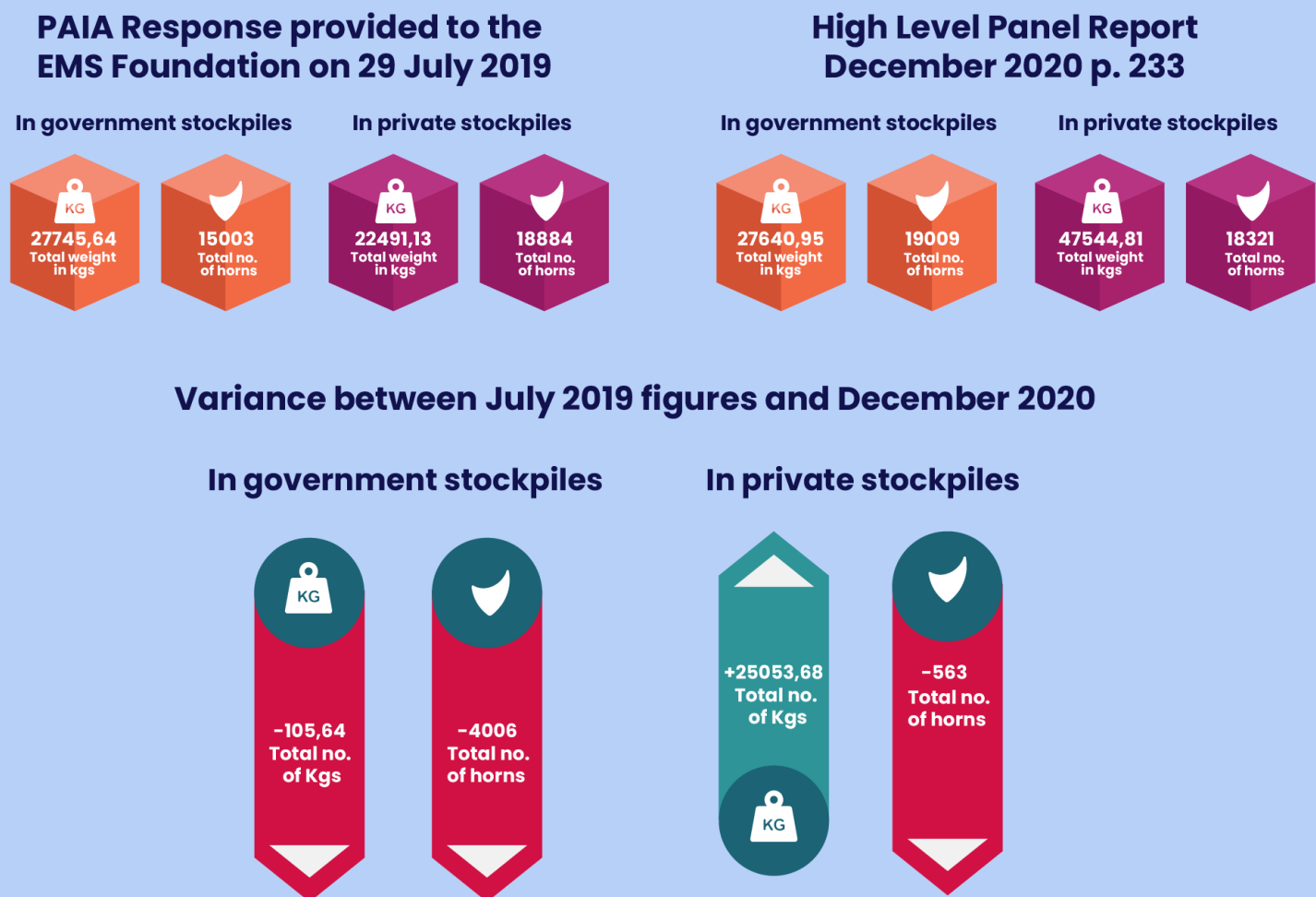
In addition to the above, there are many other major concerns related to South Africa's rhino horn stockpiles and the management thereof.

Official figures on rhino horn stockpiles are conflicting, inconsistent, untrustworthy and cannot be verified.

There is a lack of transparency in relation to South Africa's rhino horn stockpiles. The South African government does not routinely make rhino horn stockpile figures available and when this information is made available, it raises serious concerns which bring South Africa's management of rhino horn stockpiles and their monitoring and auditing processes and procedures severely into focus. It also raises questions about whether South Africa is effectively analysing its own data.

A comparison of rhino horn stockpile figures **officially provided** by the Department of Environment for the years 2019 and 2020, reveals that in a period of 17 months the government stockpiles consisted of 4006 **fewer** horns than in 2019 and that the private stockpiles for the same period showed a lesser amount of 563 (this, despite the fact, that according to the official figures provided, the weight of the private stockpiles supposedly more than doubled in the same period see Figure 1).

Figure 1 – OFFICAL RHINO HORN STOCKPILES FIGURES



CITES has also raised concerns about the inconsistent data reported to the CITES Secretariat and that this, coupled with past reported evidence of stockpile thefts, and of stockpiled horns being illegally seized, means that monitoring of stockpiles needs to be improved.

Additional concerns that relate to South Africa's stockpiles are:

- Storage facilities are not centralised.
- It is unclear whether there is a management and audit system in place that reflects on-going and real-time data and which links national and provincial data.
- The frequency of audits of all government and private rhino horn storage facilities.
- The safety of rhino horn in storage facilities is compromised as facilities are not specific for rhino horn.
- Security risks to owners and staff i.e. armed attacks.

- Significant costs associated with securing stockpiles – expensive storage and security costs.
- The nature of care and storage facilities required for organic matter.
- Lack of adequate DNA analyses for all rhino horns and all rhinos.

South Africa's rhino horn stockpiles have no conservation value or a demonstrable in situ conservation benefit and present a clear and present danger and risk of both theft and trafficking. The rapid accumulation of rhino horns, lack of transparency and oversight of stockpiles, and a legal domestic market contributes to the movement of rhino horns from stockpiles to the illegal trade.

Due to the fact, that South Africa perpetuates the perception of rhino horn as a marketable commodity and defends speculative and risky trade in an illegal 'product' – one that will never be endorsed by the international community – it is de facto contributing to illegal trade via theft as the leakage of stockpiled rhino horns into illegal trade will only continue.

Also, of concern within this context, is that the sheer number of South African Police Service personnel involved with wildlife investigations and wildlife crime that have been suspended, fired or who are under investigation for corruption, underscores the fact that South Africa criminal justice system is severely compromised.

In our view, the overriding concern must be to act in the best long-term interests of rhinos, as individual animals, as members of ecosystems, and a species that is (or should be) present in many ecosystems both within and outside South Africa. It is demonstrably not in the best interest of rhinos to be either farmed for their horns or shot as trophies which are then exported. This approach is also consistent with the upholding of core values and human rights in the South African Constitution, particularly in section 24, which explicitly refers to the duty to reasonable legislative and other measures to promote conservation, and of the rights of future generations.

Contrary to South Africa's 1994 successful proposal bid to CITES to down list its rhinos to Appendix II (so-called regulated trade), it is patently clear that the population of rhinos in South Africa have NOT withstood the exploitation resulting from the removal of CITES Appendix I protection. South Africa also argued that poaching was effectively controlled, but all the evidence shows that after the downlisting rhino poaching and exploitation (both legal and illegal) increased and poaching is most definitely not under control. South Africa and Eswatini are the only countries that have rhinos on Appendix II. This split listing makes oversight and management problematic. At CoP17, it was decided that listing a species in more than one Appendix (split-listing) should be avoided because of the enforcement problems it creates.

It is also important to appreciate that humanity co-evolved and homo sapiens (and other hominids) have coexisted with rhinos in Southern Africa for many thousands of years. Consequently, rhinos are an important presence within human cultures, and ensuring their continued existence in the wild is also a question of preserving both tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

South Africa should be concerned. According to the [IUCN Red List](#) the white rhino population is decreasing. Human activity, including trade, is leading to the [extirpation of non-human species](#). Scientists warn that human impacts are threatening to cause a sixth mass extinction. Population trends for megaherbivores such as rhinos are particularly vulnerable to human-caused climate change threats and scientists have recently discovered that [temperatures in southern Africa will rise past rhinos' tolerance](#).

Instead of destroying the rhino horn after removal, South Africa has chosen to continue the risk to the diminishing surviving rhino population by driving the perception that the horn has value and stockpiling it, so they say, under strict regulations and security. It has taken this view despite the evidence that South Africa has failed to secure the removed rhino horn in stockpiles and cannot safeguard rhino horn from being trafficked and entering the illegal market.

- It is inevitable that rhino horns from stockpiles will flow into the international illegal trade. Stockpiling and the legal domestic trade simply provide a laundering channel for illegally traded horn. Moreover, the dark web of interaction between criminal syndicates, elites and private traders suggests that holding massive rhino horn stockpiles can only lead to further criminality that undermines rhino protection and conservation. South Africa is therefore, de facto, perpetuating the black-market trade of rhino horn. South Africa is not capable of preventing leakage from the stockpiles into the illegal trade.
- South Africa must abandon the idea of trading in rhino horn and encourage other Range States to do the same.
- The future of wild life, nature and our own human existence is literally under threat. What is needed is an urgent and total overhaul of policy and legislation and a totally different way of viewing wild life and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity.

Recommendations:

- Rather than banking on the extinction of rhinos, South Africa must embrace **rhino horn stockpile destruction** as an anti-poaching, anti-trafficking, and demand reduction tool to meaningfully contribute to the ethical protection of rhino populations in Africa and Asia and to mitigate their extinction. Doing so will send a strong signal that South Africa is firmly committed to preserving and protecting rhinos, and to truly ensuring their welfare and well-being.
 - By virtue of the precautionary approach, South Africa, and other CITES States Parties must act in the best interest of the conservation of the species and urgently **uplist rhinos currently on Appendix II to Appendix I**.
-



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Appendix 1

WHAT NEXT FOR
SOUTH AFRICA RHINOS?

2024

LEGAL DISCLAIMER

The mention of any individual, company, organisation, or other entity in this report does not imply the violation of any law or international agreement, and should not be construed as such.

In this Research Report –What Next for South African Rhino – we have presented and analysed previously published media reports and excerpts from previously published media reports. We have also presented and analysed reports and presentations previously published by wildlife trade organisations, scientific reports published by pro-sustainable use wildlife organisations and wildlife conservation organisations. We have presented and analysed previously published reports presented by government and criminal justice departments in South African and abroad. We have presented previously published reports written by investigative journalists, scientists and researchers. We have re-published information including images that are all available on the world wide web and social media platforms.

Where names have been mentioned, quoted or referenced on indictments the presumptions of innocence in observance of individual rights is always preserved.

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Introduction

In a [media statement](#) on the 12th August 2014, SANParks confirmed that they had conducted a population survey in 2013 of the rhino population in the Kruger National Park which confirmed that there were between 8400 and 9600 white rhinos living in the park.

“Poaching, natural deaths and the translocation of rhino from the Kruger National Park presently match that of rhino births. This means that the rhino population in the Kruger National has stabilised.”

The inclusion of the blasé margin of error of some 1200 rhino could be overlooked except for the glaring fact that from 2007, rhinos, in the world’s second last rhino stronghold, the Kruger National Park, were being eradicated at a furious pace. Perhaps a scientific survey with exacting results might have been more appropriate at this critical juncture.

According to SANParks, they recognised that “poaching is part of a multi-billion dollar worldwide illicit wildlife trade. Addressing the scourge is not simple, that is why we will continue to strengthen holistic and integrated interventions and explore new innovative options to ensure the long-term survival of the species. In this context that Cabinet has decided that we implement these more vigorous integrated strategic management approach aimed at reducing the threat to rhinos and the biological management of the species. This includes strategic translocation, as we have always done. The protection of rhinos inside parks with intensive protection zones, and technology interventions, are being complimented with extensive emphasis on national, regional and international collaboration between law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system.”

Forensic technology and DNA analysis were also mentioned as one of the decisive actions that would be taken to protect the rhino population. At this time [Dr Hector Magome](#) was the Managing Executive Conservation Services of SANParks.

However, TRAFFIC, the wildlife trade monitoring network who works in co-operation with the Secretariat of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Fauna and Flora (CITES), was not as blasé about number of rhinos in the Kruger National Park. [They said](#) that 1004 rhinos were illegally killed during 2013 in South Africa the equivalent of three rhinos a day, making 2013 the worst year ever on record for rhino poaching in the country. [They said](#) that South Africa’s white rhino population was every closer to the tipping point when deaths will outnumber births and population will go into serious decline.

Nine years later, the content of the [SANParks Annual Report](#) 2022/23 reveals the stark reality that there are only 2060 rhinos in the Kruger National Park.

According to this latest report, there are an estimated number of, between 1711 and 1988, white rhinos and 210 black rhinos. If, indeed these numbers are accurate, they signify the loss of approximately 7500 white rhinos during the nine-year period 2013 to 2022.

Scarcely acknowledging the reality of this devastating loss of life, on the 6th of February 2023, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment issued an upbeat [statement](#) confirming that the results of South Africa's relentless fight against rhino poaching in the Kruger National Park and other national parks had resulted in a decline in rhino poaching numbers across the country in 2022 compared to the previous year.

In 2022, they said, 124 rhinos were killed in the Kruger National Park, which according to them is a 40% decrease compared with the numbers for 2021.

"The steady decline in rhino poaching in national parks is related to the relentless war that has been waged by our fearsome anti-poaching machinery as well as comprehensive dehorning programme. This year's outcome shows that collaboration between conservation authorities, the South African Police Services, revenue authorities and international agencies works". [said](#) Minister Barbara Creecy

Unfortunately, the shift in the illegal killing of rhinos for their horns has shifted away from the Kruger National Park to KwaZulu Natal.

"[We](#) believe that if provincial authorities in KwaZulu Natal follow our model, they will be able to significantly curb rhino poaching in their provincial parks before it is too late."

Examining the annual Report more closely, at the end of 2021 there were 2458 rhino in the Kruger National Park. At the end of 2022 the Report states that there are 2060 rhino in the Kruger National Park. That means that there was a loss of [398 rhino](#) which represents a loss of [16.2% of the population](#) despite a drop in poaching.

On World Rhino Day on the 22nd September 2023, the [IUCN](#) said: "South Africa is still home to more rhinos than any other country but continues to experience high losses to poaching. 438 rhinos were killed illegally in 2022 compared to 451 in 2021."

For a detailed overview of rhino poaching statistics in Africa from 2006 – 2022 see the Table below.

Range State																	
Botswana	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	7	32	62	33	6
Chad	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0	na
DR Congo	0	0	2	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	0	0	0	na
Côte d'Ivoire	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0	0
Eswatini	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	na
Kenya	3	1	6	21	22	27	29	59	35	11	10	9	4	4	0	6	1
Malawi	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1
Mozambique	0	9	5	15	16	10	16	15	19	13	5	5	8	6	2	0	na
Namibia	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	4	30	97	66	57	84	62	43	47	93
Rwanda	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0	0	0
Senegal	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0	0	0
South Africa	36	13	83													451	
Tanzania	0	0	2	0	1	2	2	0	5	5	0	2	0	0	0	0	na
Uganda	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	na
Zambia	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	1
Zimbabwe	21	38		39	52	42	31	38	20	50	35	36	34	82	12	4	11
Total	60	62												773		501	

* Minimum number

Data Source: African Rhino Specialist Group Chair report, Pachyderm No. 64 October 2022–September 2023. <https://pachydermjournal.org/index.php/pachyderm/article/view/538/1293>

The deputy chairman of Resource Africa, the former head of conservation at SANParks, and a key speaker at the 12th Oppenheimer [Research](#) Conference in October 2023, Dr [Hector Magome](#), said he was dismayed by the failure of the State to protect rhino in national and provincial parks. [According to Magome](#), “All poachers know that the will to protect rhinos is low, this is to be expected when our law enforcement officers can’t even protect women and children. In the decade from 2013 to 2023, South Africa’s criminal justice system has let poachers and traffickers kill rhino and traffic their horns with relative ease.” Magome, who joined SANParks in 1996, also said that by 2014 he had overseen the relocation of more than 1500 Kruger National Park white rhinos to private owners. Furthermore, he said that “You don’t fortify your house or property to fight a hurricane, you evacuate your valuables, the only solution was to move many rhinos to safer areas, a salvage operation. At the end of the day, I was proud of the role I played in helping establish rhino breeding programmes on private game reserves, they have become an increasingly critical haven for the species, and today support the largest number of white rhinos on the continent.”

In 2021 the EMS Foundation published a retrospective research report titled [Where Have All the Rhinos Gone?](#) The content highlighted the questionable decisions that have been made over the past two decades regarding the protection and conservation of South Africa's rhino. Including the details of hundreds of rhinos that were knowingly exported from the Kruger National Park to trophy hunters, some of whom ignited the rhino horn trade in Vietnam. Rhinos were also exported to zoos whilst at the same time thousands of rhinos were being illegally killed in the Kruger National Park.

A period that will forever be marked by a magnitude of government corruption and the capture and destruction of the South African justice system. It would be foolish to believe that South Africa's environmental sector, in which the conservation and protection of wildlife resides, has remained unscathed.

Since the publication this report in 2021 there have been some notable developments that specifically influence the survival of the rhino species in South Africa. These include, amongst other, the fact rhino poachers have shifted their focus from the Kruger National Park and are targeting the last remaining stronghold of rhino at the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Game Reserve. 2000 rhinos at the largest captive rhino breeding and rhino horn harvesting facility in the world had to be rescued by a NGO, and there have been some curious arrests and some notable convictions of perpetrators of the illegal wildlife trade.

The EMS Foundation is a South African based social justice NGO established in November 2016. Our key purpose is to alleviate and end suffering, raise public awareness, lobby and empower, provide dignity and promote the rights and interests of vulnerable groups, particularly children, the elderly and wild animals.

Lengthy Judicial Processes Involving Alleged Wildlife Trafficking and the Alleged Illegal use of Rhino Horn, 2010 – 2024



KwaZulu Natal Province © EMS Foundation 2017

Reasonable doubt is [legal terminology](#) which refers to insufficient evidence that prevents a judge or magistrate from convicting a defendant of a crime. It is the traditional standard of proof that must be exceeded to secure a guilty verdict in a criminal case of law.

In a trial, if the prosecution is finished presenting their case and the judge or magistrate finds they have not [met their](#) burden of proof, the judge may dismiss the case, even before the defence presents their side, for insufficient evidence.

The State VS Wiseman Mageba and Dumisani Gwala

In the matter of State VS Wiseman Mageba and Dumisani Gwala, Mr Maharaj, the Magistrate in the Mtubatuba Regional Court, found on the 28th July 2023, that not only did the state not meet their burden of proof, the evidence they presented in respect of Section 252A was inadmissible.

Inadmissible evidence, is evidence that may not be introduced to prove the State's claim, inadmissible is an adjective used for something or someone not allowed or worthy of being admitted. Inadmissible or inadmissibility refers to unfit, evidence in a legal action.

[Section 252A](#) of the Criminal Procedure Act 51 of 1977 which provides any law enforcement officer, official of the State or any other person authorised thereto for such purposes, herein after referred to in this Section as an official or his or her agent, may make use of a trap or engage in an undercover operation in order to detect, investigate or uncover the commission of any offence and the evidence so obtained shall be admissible if that conduct has not gone beyond providing an opportunity to commit an offence provided that where the conduct goes beyond providing an opportunity to commit an offence a court may admit evidence so obtained subject to sub-section 3.

Compared to the above Section to Section 35(5) of the Constitution which provides as follows: *“Evidence obtained in a matter that violates any right in the [Bill of Rights](#) must be excluded if the admission of that evidence would render the trial unfair or otherwise would be detrimental to the administration of justice”.*

The ruling by Magistrate Maharaj, in respect of Section 252A admissibility read as follows: *“As a result of the aforesaid reasons alluded to, when viewed holistically, the Court finds that the conduct of the police clearly went beyond the opportunity for committing the crime.*

In these circumstances it would be remiss of the Court to allow such evidence to be admissible. In my view, the admissibility of such evidence would render the trial unfair as well as be detrimental to the administration of justice as well as public policy.

Accordingly the evidence relating to the trap of the sale of rhino horns to the accused on the dates mentioned in counts 1 to 10 and its alternatives are ruled inadmissible.”

What is evident in the outcome of matter is the fact that the South African Police Services and the National Prosecuting Authority relied entirely upon the outcome of trap(s) which they allegedly set using rhino horn(s) from the Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife stockpile.

The South African public had, however, been led to believe since the first [article](#) was published in the media on the 21st December 2014, with information supplied by two people both of whom attended the questionable entrapment and multiple shooting of Dumisani Gwala, who was unarmed, and the intense media campaign that followed, that he was a rhino poaching kingpin based on the evidence an eighteen month investigation.

The State VS Groenewald and Six Others

A [presentation](#) was delivered in Parliament, on the 7th November 2023, by the National Head of the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation, Lieutenant General SG Lebeya which provided insight into the Constitutional Judgement in the State VS Groenewald and Six Others.

Information from the HAWKS Presentation:

The State alleges that Dawie Groenewald managed his enterprise and operated his business or activities to traffic rhino horns with the assistance of the other accused, as well as other persons, known and unknown to the State.

They were employed by the enterprise and were directly or indirectly involved in or participated in the conduct of the enterprise and/or that they directly or indirectly acquired an interest in the enterprise and/or maintained the business; and that the transactions in which Dawie Groenewald was involved in the wildlife industry including hunting animals mentioned in the endangered or protected species list of National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act (NEMBA), Act 10 of 2004, including leopards, elephants and white rhinos as well as the trade in different species of animals including white rhinos.

Since 2008, various aspects in the operations of Out of Africa indicate that illegalities have occurred.

The business with white rhinos was expanded into a profitable business, which included legal and illegal activities, both nationally and internationally. The supply of an illegal firearm by Dawie Groenewald to persons in Musina was part of these activities.

The said illegal activities were repeatedly conducted with the assistance of the other accused as well as several other persons. Each of the persons and the accused fulfilled specific tasks as set out in the indictment.

Elephant tusks, leopard skulls and skins were also confiscated during the arrest of the enterprise on 20th September 2010.

The illegal operations occurred in many forms of which the following incidents are examples:

- Rhinos have been illegally dehorned on wildlife farms.
- Rhino owners have been approached to illegally dehorn their rhinos and/or sell their horns illegally.
- Rhinos were illegally hunted on a said farm.
- Rhinos were sold or exchanged in transactions without permits, to and from farm Prachtig.
- Rhinos were killed illegally on the said farm and illegally dehorned.
- Rhino horns were purchased illegally.
- Rhino horns were illegally possessed.
- Rhino horns were sold illegally.

The racketeering prosecution was authorised by the former National Director of Public Prosecutions (NDPP) on the 28th September 2011.

On the 30th September 2011, the indictment with the Prevention of Organised Crime Act 121 of 1998 (POCA) authorisations was served on the accused. The indictment consisted of 1840 charges. The accused lodged requests for further particulars whilst the case was enrolled in the Musina Regional court. The further particulars consisted of hundreds of pages but were answered by the State.

On the 3rd October 2012, a High Court motion application was lodged against the then Department of Environmental Affairs, by two gentleman who were not accused in this matter as a party, to set aside the moratorium prohibiting the trade in rhino horn.

A significant number of charges in this prosecution was preferred in terms of a contravention of the moratorium and trade in rhino horn. The High Court set aside the moratorium on the 26th November 2015, and the said Department lodged an application for leave to appeal to the High Court and subsequently to the Constitutional court which was dismissed on the 29th March 2017.

On the 3rd May 2013 the current criminal case was transferred to the High Court in Pretoria for the trial to commence on the 21st July 2014. However, a meeting was held with the Judge President during February 2014 in which the latter indicated that the trial should not commence until the judgement of the High Court in the motion application discussed supra has been delivered. Subsequently the indictment had to be reviewed and an amended indictment was served during December 2017.

On the 29th January 2018, the accused appeared and requested a remand to enable them to approach the Judge to appoint Judge to hear arguments regarding the State's response to their further particulars. The meeting unfortunately did not take place because the Judge was ill.

The matter was enrolled for pre-trial on the 22nd March 2018, however, the accused counsel withdrew from record.

On the 27th March 2018, Mr Dawie (accused 1) lodged a motion application against various Government Departments, inclusive of the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA), attacking the issuing of permits after the declaration of non-validity of the moratorium. Further applicants joined the application by accused 1 as parties in 2019, causing a delay in the matter.

During March 2018 both accused 2, Mr Toet and accused 6 brought applications in terms of section 342A on the basis that the current criminal case should be struck of the court roll due to the delay's caused by the second motion application.

This application was dismissed by the Judge and court found that the application of accused 6 relied on anticipated delays, based on speculation, which is unacceptable; even if the motion is successful, not all the charges would be affected, that the section 342A application should not be taken lightly due to the magnitude of the criminal case, that the NPA has a mandate to prosecute and the rule of law cannot be undermined.

Hereafter, the case was enrolled to sort out the legal representation of the accused and to await the judgement of the motion application lodged by Accused 1. However, during 2021 and as per the directives of the criminal court by way of an order of the Honourable Bam, it was directed amongst other, that the matter must be enrolled for trial. Unfortunately, the trial did not start in 2021 as directed.

According to the information received by the State, the NDPP and the Department of Environmental Affairs already infilled their opposing papers in this motion, which was previously enrolled in July 2022 according to accused 1. The criminal case was, at that stage postponed until 16 January 2023.

The affidavit of the former State Attorney to whom this matter was allocated and who is now in private practise, is instructive of what the sequence of events were in this matter.

The affidavit of the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, Pretoria, outlines the history of the matter. It should also be noted that the present State Attorney, seems to be the 4th State Attorney assigned to this matter.

The intervention from the Office of the State Attorney was requested on 4 October as per the direction of the honourable court. All opposing parties will present proof that their documents were filed, whether it was uploaded onto Case lines or not.

In summary

- The accused were arrested in 2010, however, they were all released on bail.
- The matter has been enrolled for 14 years.
- The case has not been set down for trial and 185 witnesses would be required to testify. It is common cause that the matter would be enrolled for an extended period.
- The reasons for the postponements varied, inter alia caused by two motion applications launched by the main and co-accused and other parties. The possibility of further appeals and Constitutional Court applications cannot be negated.
- The delay caused harm to all parties involved, including the State and witnesses.
- The right to a fair and speedy trial should also be afforded to the State. The State has indicated at all material times that are ready to proceed with the trial of the matter.
- The State is of the view that the two motion applications caused significant delays in the matter.
- The matter was previously allocated to an Advocate who had fallen seriously ill in 2022 of which the case was transferred to another Advocate from the office of the DPP in Pretoria.
- On 5th October 2023 the Judge, ruled that the matter must be transferred to the High Court Division of Limpopo for further handling.
- The matter was postponed to 9th February 2024 for the first appearance in the High Court Division of Limpopo in Polokwane and the trial date was also stipulated as 7 October 2024 to 1 November 2024 by the Judge.
- The Advocate was instructed by her office to transfer the case all the evidence to the High Court Division of Limpopo in Polokwane for a new prosecutor to be appointed.
- All preparations are made by the prosecution and investigation team to transfer the matter and will brief the new prosecutor when allocated to the matter.

Noteworthy Wildlife Crime Convictions, 2022 – 2023



KwaZulu Natal Province © EMS Foundation 2023

Gideon Gerhardus van Deventer and Nicolaas Brand van Deventer

Gideon Gerhardus van Deventer and Nicolaas Brand van Deventer from Bronkhorstspuit, a town east of Pretoria in Gauteng Province, were [apprehended](#) by a joint team from Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife and the South African Police Services when they were caught with hunting rifles, knives, gloves and two-way radios and four rhino horns severed from the carcasses of two freshly killed adult bull rhino.

The rhinos were killed only 400 meters off a road frequented by tourists near the Cengeni Gate the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Game Reserve in 2006. The brothers had fitted false number plates to their vehicles and supplied false identity numbers when checking into the wildlife reserve.

Following their arrests, several other people were arrested in various parts of the country following their arrests. At the time South African Police [said](#) the Van Deventer brothers were linked to numerous other rhino poaching cases in the Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga and Limpopo.

[According](#) to the UK based Save the Rhino organisation, they entered a bargain agreement with the National Prosecuting Authority in exchange for information on who was running the so called "[boere rhino mafia syndicate](#)" which allowed pseudo-hunters to obtain hunting permits for criminals who leaked rhino horn onto the back market in Asia, particularly in Vietnam.

The State prosecutors [told the North Gauteng High Court](#) that their star witness in a rhino poaching trial refused to testify after being intimidated. Van Deventer brothers allegedly reneged on this plea deal when their families were threatened and the case against the criminals higher up the chain [collapsed](#). Gideon van Deventer was sentenced to eight years and Nicolaas van Deventer was [sentenced](#) to two and a half years in prison to be served in Kroonstad officially named Maokeng, in the Free State Province.

South Africans Gideon and Nicolaas van Deventer were [arrested](#) with Zimbabwean Onward Muchangowa on the Vivo and Makhado road in Limpopo Province on the 6th January 2017. Allegedly when they realised that they were being followed by the police they threw a bag containing rhino horn out of the window of car in which they were travelling during a high-speed car chase. The Police said that they were [acting](#) on a tip-off that the brothers were trying to sell rhino horn in the Makhado area.

Police spokesman Brigadier Motlafela Mojapelo [said](#): "Initially the pair were linked to a case at Waterpoort, where two rhinos were shot and dehorned in the first week of January. Now we have evidence that links them to another case where a rhino was killed and dehorned at the Polokwane Game Reserve over Christmas. The carcass was found on New Years Day."

After being in custody since their arrest in 2017, on the 5th of May 2022 Gideon and Nicolass van Deventer [pleaded guilty](#) to conspiracy to hunt rhino, illegal hunting, killing and dehorning a rhino bull, possession of rhino horn, selling of rhino horn and trespassing they were imprisoned to 10 and 15 years respectively in the Giyani Magistrate's Court in Limpopo Province.

The State Prosecutor, Advocate Norman Makuvele, called Mario Scholtz of SANParks who testified about rhino poaching and its economic impact, he explained that the rate of rhinos poached had overtaken the reproduction rate of the species.

Makuvele asked the court to sentence the accused to a long period of imprisonment because of their numerous previous convictions, most of which relate to environmental issues and rhino poaching in South Africa.

He expressed disappointment in a [written statement](#) addressed to the Daily Maverick saying that the sentences were too lenient considering the numerous offences the brothers were convicted of, the serious nature of the offences and their prior convictions for rhino poaching and illegal weapons.

Lawrence Makamu, George Miyanga and Nul Burro

On the 17th January 2023, the Skukuza Regional Court convicted and [sentenced](#) three Mozambican nationals, after they were found guilty of poaching related activities. Lawrence Makamu, George Miyanga and Nul Burro were convicted of trespassing, contravention of the Immigration Act, possession of a firearm, conspiracy to commit illegal poaching, killing of a black rhino, two counts of the killing of a white, possession of ammunition and possession of two hunting knives.

On the 30th of June 2022, the trio illegally entered the Kruger National Park at the Malelane Gate where they allegedly killed a black rhino. The rangers heard gunshots and started searching for the source using a helicopter. They found two more rhino that had been killed and Makamu, Miyanga and Burro hiding in possession of six fresh rhino horns, firearms, two hunting knives and four live rounds of ammunition.

They pleaded guilty State Prosecutor Lot Mgiba led evidence using DNA results which linked the suspects to the carcasses of the black rhino, and the rhino horns were directly linked to the two white rhinos.

It was found that George Miyanga had a previous conviction of illegal poaching and he was sentenced to 33 years in prison, Makamu and Burro were sentenced to 22 in prison. The NPA acknowledged the collaboration between the investigative officers and prosecutors.

Mfana Ignitus Kubai

Mfana Ignitus Kubai was [arrested](#) in June 2014 at Chataronga in Northern Limpopo after a carcass of a recently killed rhino was found with two horns missing. He was found in possession of a rifle, a silencer in a lunch box and two rhino horns in a black refuse bag.

A guilty verdict was handed down, Kubai approached the court with an application to leave to appeal the conviction and sentence.

Kubai argued in an appeal that his sentence was too high, he said that court had not taken into consideration that he was a first offender and a breadwinner and had spent two years in custody awaiting trial. However, the appeal judges indicated at the onset that the sentence imposed had not been in accordance with the Limpopo Environmental Management Act (LEMA) which prescribed a maximum term of 15 years, and as a result they were "bound to interfere".

On 27th January 2023, an appeal court [increased](#) the prison sentence of a rhino poacher from 11 to 15 years. Limpopo Judge Legodi Phatudi and Judge Thogomelani Tshidada said that the initial sentence given to Mfana Ignitus Kubai in the Louis Trichardt Regional Court in 2016 was "lenient and shockingly inappropriate".

Judge Phatudi said Kubai had committed an offence which infringed the rights of all South Africans to have the environment protected.

At Kubai's initial trial his claim that he knew nothing about rhino poaching was rebutted as there was evidence to suggest that he had been involved with rhino poaching in 2008 but had not been prosecuted because he had assisted the police which led to the arrest of some Chinese nationals.

Judge Phatudi said Kubai was clearly knowledgeable on how to poach wild animals and had found his niche in rhino poaching, he went to Chatatronga with the full intent to hunt, he was armed with a rifle and a silencer.

"I am not persuaded to consider him as a fallen angle and it is immaterial whether he is a first offender or not.

I find it necessary to increase the sentence in order to bring equilibrium to the scales of justice relating to the offence and the interests of society, as opposed to Kubai's personal circumstances."

Judge Phatudi said a sentence less than the prescribed maximum of 15 years in terms of LEMA would be disproportionate because of Kubai's involvement in rhino poaching in 2008, and because he viewed poaching as his niche and a lucrative business opportunity.

Francis Chitiyo, Trymore Chauke, Misheck Chauke, Simba Masinge, Nhamo Muyambo and Abraham Moyane

Five years after their arrest, Francis Chitiyo, Trymore Chauke, Misheck Chauke, Simba Masinge, Nhamo Muyambo and Abraham Moyane were [sentenced](#) to between 16 to 20 years for conspiracy to kill rhinos so that they could steal their horns, and for possession of an unlawful firearm and ammunition in the Makhanda High Court in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape on the 14th June 2023.

In sentencing the six men, Judge GH Bloem referred to the men as a well-organised group of criminals who were arrested after a stellar investigation by the South African Police Services, who acted on information and apprehended the poachers.

The prosecution commended South African Police Service at Jeffreys Bay Stock Theft and Endangered Species Commander Captain Morne Viljoen and his investigative team for their excellent work. Eastern Cape provincial commissioner Lieutenant General Nomthethelei Mene commended the investigating team for its crucial role in ensuring appropriate sentencing.

On the 18th October 2022 it was reported that five men convicted of rhino poaching in the Eastern Cape were among seven escapees from the Waainek Correction Facility in Makhanda.

The five men were [arrested](#) on 31st July 2018 with axes, rolls of black plastic refuse bags, knives, overalls and shoes in backpacks, 10 cell phones and R12 350.00 in cash as well as a hunting rifle that was later ballistically linked to several poaching incidents at the Great Fish Reserve on the road between Makhanda and Fort Beaufort on the 16th March 2016 where two rhinos were killed but only one was dehorned.

A month later, another three rhinos were killed and dehorned at the Great Fish Reserve. The court found that the men struck again at Kleindoringberg Game Farm between Cradock and Middelburg on the 15th and 16th July 2017 where they dehorned a rhino and left an axe behind. They were also linked to an incident in December 2017 at the Lourens de Lange Nature Reserve situated between Queenstown and Aliwal North, when a heavily pregnant rhino cow was killed with a bullet fired from a .375 calibre rifle and dehorned.

Another two rhinos were killed and dehorned at Kleindoringberg Game Farm on the 24th and 25th February 2018 and the men were linked to the death of a rhino at Thorndale Farm between the 7th and 9th June 2018.

The men were linked to the death of a rhino cow known as Bella at the Kragga Kamma Game Park in Gqeberha in June 2018, even though she had been dehorned, they hacked off what remained of her stump.

A few days later the men killed a rhino cow and her calf at the Shamwari Game Reserve, both rhinos were dehorned.

The five rhino poachers used a hacksaw to cut through the holding cell's burglar bars they were awaiting their sentencing after being convicted in the Makhanda High Court on the 30th September 2022 of killing 13 rhinos between 2016 and 2018 across a wide area of the Eastern Cape.

Simba Masinga was found hiding in the bushes near Committees Drift and re-arrested the day after the escape. Trymore Chauke was re-arrested in the farming community of Seven Fountains on the 23rd October after he broke cover by asking for food. Abraham Moyane was re-arrested near an unnamed private nature reserve where he was found with poaching equipment. Francis Chito and Nhamo Muyambo remained at large until Sunday 21st May 2023, when they were rearrested in a house in Mthatha. The five men faced [additional charges](#) of escaping from custody.

Shiuhau Chen, Eugene Huang and Ping Wu

At a briefing on the 2nd August 2023, by the Directorate for Priority Crimes Investigation [Project Python](#) was mentioned in Parliament. This investigation concentrated on a rhino horn trafficking syndicate operating between Mpumalanga Gauteng and Southeast Asia. The enterprise, according to the presentation, was managed by a Mr E Huang and his associates Mr S Chen and Ms Ping Wu.

Further to the aforementioned [presentation](#), all three suspects were arrested and were denied bail. R2 232 950 and two vehicles were forfeited to the state. Accused number on Mr E Huang died in custody of natural causes.

Shiuhau Chen, a Chinese national was found guilty on three counts of illegally dealing in rhino horn and contravening the Immigration Act in the Kempton Park Regional Court on Friday 20th January 2023. He was given a fine of R500 000- or five-years imprisonment for dealing three times in rhino horns. This sentence is on [appeal](#).

[According](#) to the provincial spokesperson for the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation HAWKS, Captain Dineo Sekgotodi, Chen, along with Eugene Huang and his life partner Ping Wu were arrested in August 2019 by the Middelburg based Serious Organised Crime Investigation team who were investigating a rhino horn syndicate operating between Mpumalanga and Gauteng. The convict and his accomplices paid for rhino horns during controlled purchases between 2018 and 2019. Wu and Huang were charged with money laundering for their involvement. Wu and Huang were charged with money laundering for their involvement. Wu assisted with depositing the proceeds of the rhino horn transaction into a casino account.”

Ping Wu was [sentenced](#) in March 2022 for five years in jail by the Tembisa regional court.

Enock Ngobeni

Enock Ngobeni, a Mozambique national, was [convicted](#) of trespassing, contravention of the Immigration Act, two counts of killing rhinos, conspiracy to commit an offense and possession of a dangerous weapon at the Skukuza Regional Court on the 4th July 2023. He was sentenced to 22 years behind bars.

The South African National Prosecuting Authority’s provincial spokesperson, Monica Nyuswa, said Ngobeni pleaded guilty to the crimes and was convicted.

“On April 17, rangers of the Tshokwane Section were patrolling and found two rhino carcasses. They followed footprints and found Ngobeni and his unknown accomplice in possession of a firearm and two fresh rhino horns. Ngobeni was arrested while his accomplice escaped and is still on the run,” she said.

In aggravation of sentence, the regional court prosecutor, Lot Mgiba, led DNA evidence of rhino horns discovered in Ngobeni’s possession that matched the two rhino carcasses that were found.

Kruger National Park spokesperson, Isaac Phaahla, [said](#) they welcomed the sentencing and hoped that it would send a strong message to those who are considering poaching rhinos inside the Kruger. “We will continue working with law enforcement to ensure that we decisively deal with poaching. We would like to congratulate our rangers for arresting the poachers and making sure the law played its part.”

Thomas Yingwana

The Skukuza Regional Court sentenced a Mozambican national Thomas Yingwana in August 2023, to nine years imprisonment for hunting in the Kruger National Park.

Police [spokesperson](#) Brigadier Selvy Mohlala said Yingwana had entered South African illegally in 2022. In November field rangers were patrolling the Lower Sabie region in the Kruger National Park when they spotted footprints.

The footprints were traced by the field rangers and they located Yingwana who was armed with a hunting knife, and ammunition and other others used for hunting. "Members of the police from Skukuza SA Police Service were notified about the incident and upon arrival he was arrested and charged accordingly.

Yingwana pleaded guilty to the charges against him, he was convicted of trespassing, contravention of the Immigration Act, possession of an unlicensed firearm, illegal possession of ammunition, possession of unlicensed firearm, with an intention to commit crime, possession of a dangerous weapon.

Provincial Commission of Police in Mpumalanga, Lieutenant General Semakaleng Daphney Manamela welcomed the sentence "I hope that the sentence will serve as a deterrence to others who might consider emulating the actions of the accused."

Sidney Sibuyi

On the 5th of October 2023 it was [reported](#) that Sidney Sibuyi was sentenced to 30 years in prison at the Skukuza Regional Court. According to reports he was part of a three-man poaching gang that unlawfully entered the Stolznek section of the Kruger National Park on the 26th September 2020.

Sibuyi was arrested after shots were heard by Field Rangers who reacted and gave chase according to a [statement](#) by SANParks, but his two accomplices managed to get away and at the time of reporting were still at large.

A bag containing fresh rhino horn and a heavy calibre rifle silencer were recovered close to where Sibuyi was apprehended. Sibuyi pled guilty to trespassing in a National Park, hunting of rhinoceros and conspiracy to commit a crime.

"We are happy at this heavy sentence imposed by the court and hope that it will send a strong message that wildlife crime is serious matter and has lifelong consequence for those who are caught. Our mandate is to conserve and preserve these magnificent creatures for future generations for people to mercilessly slaughter three at a go, indicates how callous these criminals are and they deserve these heavy sentences. Our enhanced security measures, dedicated rangers, and police will ensure that people pay the price when they get caught inside the Kruger National Park" [said](#) the Managing Executive of the Kruger National Park, Oscar Mthimkhulu.

Friday Ngoveni

Friday Ngoveni was arrested in the Stolzneke section of the Kruger National Park in 2017 he was found in possession of a 458-calibre hunting rifle, ammunition and an axe. He and his co-accused successfully applied for bail and never returned for their trial on the appointed day.

A warrant for his arrest was issued and in 2023 he was apprehended, he appeared in the Skukuza Regional Court on the 4th December and was sentenced for trespassing in a National Park, possession of a prohibited illegal firearm, conspiracy to commit a crime, possession of unlicensed ammunition, possession of a dangerous weapon and given a 10-year sentence.

Oscar Mthimkhulu, managing executive of the Kruger National Park [said](#): "The continuous successful prosecution and sentencing of poacher in the court certainly boosts the morale of the hardworking men and women of the Ranger Corps who patrol the bush, day and night chasing after criminals to protect our natural heritage. We are grateful to the National Prosecuting Authority for compiling a fool-proof docket and the court for imposing the sentence. We hope other criminals will learn from this experience as we have eyes and ears everywhere 24/7 and will catch them and ensure that they are put behind bars for a very long time."

Theo Boon Ching

Theo Boon Ching, a businessman known as "The Godfather" aka Zhang, Dato Sri, appeared before federal magistrate judge Gabriel Gorenstein in New York on the 7th October 2022 charged with allegedly participating in a conspiracy to traffic more than 70kg of rhino horn valued at more than R13 million.

Ching is a Malaysian citizen who was arrested in Thailand in June at the request of the US following a lengthy undercover operation by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and other law enforcement agencies.

[According](#) to the US Embassy and Consulate in Thailand: "He was sentenced to 18 months in prison for conspiring to traffic hundreds of kilograms of rhinoceros horns worth millions of dollars that involved illegal poaching of numerous rhinos, an endangered wildlife species. The sentence was imposed on September 19, 2023 by US District Judge Paul Crotty of the Southern District of New York.

Arrests in South Africa and Mozambique of Alleged Perpetrators of the Illegal Wildlife Trade Published in the Media 2022 – 2024



Limpopo Province ©EMS Foundation 2015

Inverdoorn, Western Cape 2021

Four suspects were arrested on the 13th December 2021 for killing four rhinos and injuring a fifth rhino on a private game reserve called Inverdoorn Game Reserve in the Western Cape Province on the 8th December 2021. Allegedly, large calibre rifle rounds from silenced weapons were identified on the scene.

The South African Police Services, Cape Nature and forensic investigator Wayne Stoltz initiated the investigation which led to the arrest.

Dereck Lewitton, a conservationist from Black Rock Rhino [was quoted](#) in the media after the arrest saying that poaching has been much more successful and brutal in the last five years than what the government has admitted. "As the national rhino population disappears, the same armed, well-funded poaching syndicates are turning their attention in a more determined way to the private reserves that still have healthy populations. The private rhino reserves have always been subjected to the same poaching pressures but we've been successful in protecting our populations because for us it's a personal mission and it's not a job." said Lewitton.

Police spokesperson Colonel Andre Traut [said](#) the suspects who are aged between 27 and 56 years old, were arrested over the weekend. "It is suspected that the suspects are responsible for the death of four rhinos and the injury caused to a fifth one, two of the suspects are also facing charges related to the Immigration Act.

Simon Ernesto Valoi

Simon Ernesto Valoi also known as Navara and an associate named Paulo Zukula, were arrested by authorities in Mozambique on the 26 July 2022, allegedly attempting to sell rhino horn in Maputo in Mozambique. According to investigative [report](#), Navara has the reputation of being one of the most notorious rhino poaching syndicate leaders in Mozambique, allegedly preying on rhinos in the Kruger National Park.

In a sting operation, Hilario Lole, a spokesperson for the National Criminal Investigation Service known as SERNIC in Mozambique, said that Valoi and Zukula had brought pieces of horn from rhinos poached in Mozambique's Gaza province and the Massingir district, which is on the border of the Kruger National Park, to meet a potential buyer in Maputo.

According to the same article, during a tour of Massingir in 2017 it was [evident](#) that Navara and other poaching kingpins had built mansion with the profits from the sale of rhino horn to Chinese and Vietnamese buyers over the past two decades. These opulent homes stood in contrast to the general poverty of the rural district of Massingir.

In 2015 journalists from [Spiegel International](#), Bartholomäus Grill and Toby Selander travelled to Mozambique to report on the illegal rhino horn trade. According to their research the primary trade route leads directly through to the area around Massingir district, in the southern Mozambican province of Gaza, known as the capital of the rhino kingpins.

The administrators of Mozambique's Limpopo National Park are, according to the journalists, very familiar with Navara. The foreign journalists approached Navara directly and he accused them of trespassing. They were detained for a harrowing eight hours.

At the Maputo press conference following the arrest of Navara, the spokesperson for SERNIC [Hilario Lole](#) described him as the mentor or leader of poaching gangs.

"This individual provided the guns said Lole. He selected the poachers and provided the other equipment used in hunting wild animals. Navara's gang, he said had undertaken its criminal activities in Gaza, and along the border with South Africa."

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment also [mentioned](#) the arrest saying "the notoriously well-known Mozambican rhino poaching kingpin Simon Tivani aka Navara was arrested in Maputo in a combined sting operation between the Mozambican authorities and the Wildlife Justice Commission".

Odis Maluleke

On the 9th of May 2023 the South Africa Police Service office of the Provincial Commissioner in Mpumalanga issued a [media statement](#) confirming that a rhino poaching suspect who had previously been arrested but had skipped bail, Odis Maluleke, was rearrested at Kabokweni, a town in the Ehlanzeni District Municipality in Mpumalanga Province.

Police from the Skukuza Stock Theft Unit, acting on intelligence, with the assistance of Tactical Response Team rearrested Odis Maluleke who had successfully managed to evade arrest for a number of years.

Odis Maluleke, a Mozambican was initially arrested with three South Africans on the 20th [July 2015](#) near Skukuza in the Paul Kruger Gate of the Kruger National Park. The arrest followed a search of their vehicle uncovered a hunting rifle, 12 rounds of ammunition and an axe. The four individuals were charged with trespassing in a protected area, possession of an unlicensed firearm, illegal possession of a dangerous weapon. Odis Maluleke, was released on R20 000.00 bail, but unlike his accomplices he failed to appear in court and a warrant for his arrest was issued.

According to [media](#) reports, in May 2017, Odis Maluleke was arrested at a private wildlife reserve in the North West province. Maluleke was injured after, allegedly, shooting at the Police who were tracking him and an accomplice following a rhino poaching incident. He was granted bail at the Ganyesa Magistrates Court in North West province.

According to [court documents](#), on 15th February 2019, Phillip Gumede a SANParks employee travelled in his motor vehicle in the Kruger National Park from Skukuza to the Kruger Gate situated near Hazyview in Mpumalanga. When Kruger National Park officials stopped the vehicle in which the defendant was travelling, they found him to be dressed in SANParks corporate uniform. His vehicle was searched, two freshly removed rhino horns, a hunting rifle, wet clothing and wet shoes were discovered in the vehicle.

The horns were found in a ruck sack behind the front passenger seat of the vehicle. The horns and rifle were wrapped in black refuse bags. The wet clothes were in a bag, the shoes were covered in mud and grass seeds. The defendant was arrested by SANParks officials and members of the South African National Defence Force.

Three other people were also arrested by SANParks officials shortly before the defendant was arrested. They travelled in another vehicle on the same road a distance behind the defendant. These persons were interrogated by SANParks officials. Information obtained at the interrogation lead the officials to the carcasses of two rhinos that were shot in the park shortly before the discovery.

The horns that were found in the Gumede's vehicle were subsequently linked to the rhino carcasses, one of these suspects was Odis Maluleke.

[Phillip Gumede](#) and his co-accused appeared in the Skukuza Magistrates Court shortly after their arrest. Subsequently, the case was transferred to the Regional Court where rhino poaching cases are adjudicated for the penalties that may be imposed for rhino poaching which exceed the Magisterial Court jurisdiction.

Despite strong opposition from the investigating officer, Odis Maluleke was granted R30 000.00 bail at the Bushbuckridge Magistrate's Court in Mpumalanga province.

During the proceeding before the Regional Court, Odis Maluleke absconded.

Mahikeng CAS 307/06/2023

According to information [presented](#) in Parliament on the 7th November 2023 by the National Head of the Directorate of Priority Crime Investigation Lieutenant General SG Lebeya, on the 26th June 2023 the security officer patrolling the North West Parks Board, Cooks Lake premises noticed that the aluminium door was forced open. Upon close examination he noticed that the alarm system and camera system main frame box was damaged. The door handles of two offices were also broken and cameras in the passage were damaged. The Police were informed of the break in. Upon investigation of the crime scene, it was discovered that a small safe that had keys to the walk-in safe had been stolen and the keys used to open safe. Fifty-one rhino horns with an estimated value of R9 million were stolen from the safe.

Elias Manganda was arrested on the 29th June 2023, Lindani Vernon Mthombeni was arrested in Brits on the 4th July 2023, Lonjezo Kanjipiti was arrested on the 14th July in Rustenburg and Lefa Danie Makgaba was arrested on the 15th July in Rustenburg. They appeared on the 19th October 2023 for a bail application. The case was postponed to the 3rd November 2023.

According to the HAWKS presentation to parliament on the 7th November 2023, the rhino horns have not yet been recovered.

Derek Lewitton

There was intense media interest when Derek Lewitton, an [American](#) and [outspoken](#) advocate for the international rhino horn trade was arrested on 22nd December 2023.

[According](#) to numerous media articles Lewitton was arrested after a sixteen-hour investigation at a game farm located in the small town of Gravelotte in Limpopo Province. There has been media [speculation](#) that the farm and rhino belonged or had belonged to [rhino farmer](#) and Piet Warren.

Lewitton was released on R100 000.00 bail by the Namakgale Magistrates Court in Phalaborwa in Limpopo Province twenty days his arrest. The charges and bail amount relates to, [according](#) to media reports, "16 unlawful firearms and ammunition" [and](#) the " possession of 10 unmarked rhino horns." His lawyer, Maurice Crespi, [confirmed](#) in a media report that his client will be pleading not guilty to the charges when he returns to court in March.

Major General Scheepers, Deputy Provincial Commissioner for Limpopo Province, [said](#) that there were numerous rhino carcasses found on the property, "whenever a rhino dies, it must be reported to the South African Police and the Department of Nature Conservation."

Examples of Rhino Horn Seizures in and from South Africa, 2022 – 2024

Operation Golden Strike

On the 24th January 2022 the results of an eight-week INTERPOL operation against wildlife crime and trafficking resulted in arrests and seizures across Asia and Africa.

Codenamed [Golden Strike](#), the operation ended at the end of 2021 and targeted criminals and networks smuggling wildlife protected under CITES from Africa to Asia.

During the pre-operational stage, countries worked together to identify INTERPOL-wanted fugitives who are known to travel frequently between Africa, Asia, the USA and France and who are wanted for their involvement in trafficking in ivory, rhino horn, pangolin and tiger parts between the two continents.

The seizures at the time of publication included several thousand wildlife products and the identification of 100 suspects across 23 countries which triggered worldwide arrests. The seizures included 50 rhino horns weighing 72kg.

Bedfordview, Johannesburg, February 2022

[According](#) to South African Police Services representative, Captain Ndivhuwo Mulamu, in February 2022, whilst they whilst they were following up on an on-going intelligence led investigation from 2021 they were led to a residential estate in Senderwood in Bedfordview in the east of Johannesburg.

Upon arrival the HAWKS searched the premises and discovered suitcases wrapped in plastic, believed to be ready for distribution. The luggage was searched it included grocery items, brown boxes and 8 scrap laptops.

Inside the boxes 29 rhino horn weighing 51.94 kilograms with an estimated R6 million were wrapped in heavy tin foil.

A woman was arrested and Major General Kadwa [said](#): "This is viewed as a major breakthrough as the suspect arrested is believed to form part of a formidable international wildlife trafficking network."



Image Credit:

<https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/bedfordview-woman-arrested-after-29-rhino-horns-worth-r6m-allegedly-found-in-her-garage-20220217>

OR Tambo International Airport, April 2022

It was [reported](#) on the 29th April 2022 that Customs officers of the South African Revenue Service (SARS) in collaboration with other government departments, intercepted the luggage of a female South African passenger at OR Tambo International Airport which contained twelve pieces of rhino horn weighing 30.7kg.

The interception of the rhino horn came after the SARS Customs and other government officials received a tip-off regarding a passenger travelling to Dubai.



Images Credit: <https://www.sars.gov.za/media-release/rhino-horn-found-in-luggage-at-or-tambo-international-airport/>

Oliver Tambo International Airport, May 2022

According to Colonel Athlenda Mathe of the South African Police Services, the hand luggage of a Singapore bound passenger was searched by security officials at OR Tambo Airport in Johannesburg in May 2022 where 26kg of rhino horns were discovered.



SA Police Service 🇿🇦 🛡️
@SAPoliceService



[#sapsHQ](#) A multidisciplinary team established to prevent and clamp down on illicit activities at the OR Tambo International Airport on Tuesday seized 26kg of [#rhino](#) horn carried by a man (41) destined for Singapore. The man was arrested. [#EnviroCrimes](#) ML
[saps.gov.za/newsroom/msspe...](https://www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/msspe...)



19:59 · 2022/05/26 From Earth

Image Credit: <https://www.saps.gov.za/newsroom/ms.php>

Singapore Changi Airport, October 2022

In October 2022, Singapore authorities made their biggest ever seizure of rhino horns, worth R15 million, confiscated from a passenger arriving from South Africa en route to Laos.

20 pieces of rhino horn weighing 34 kilograms were discovered by sniffer dogs at Singapore Changi Airport. The horns were to be tested to identify the source after which they would be destroyed to prevent them from re-entering the market.

[Sthembiso Gumedé](#) appeared in court in Singapore on the 6th October 2022.



Image credit: <https://www.nparks.gov.sg/>

Kruger National Park Intensive Protection Zones Field Rangers and South African Police Services Linked to Rhino Poaching and the Illegal Rhino Horn Trade

Criminal networks involved in rhino poaching in the Kruger National Park have also been linked to other violent and organised crime activities in South Africa. Project Broadbill was briefly mentioned in a [presentation](#) by the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation in August 2023.

[According](#) to the Wildlife Justice Commission, as part of the Project Broadbill operation, seven members of a rhino horn trafficking network based in Mpumalanga province were arrested in 2018. The Project was described as being the most extensive operation of its kind in South Africa, involving 123 officers in a multi-agency taskforce led by the South African Police Services.

The [seven suspects](#) included former police officers, serving police officers who were charged with theft, conspiracy to commit a crime, illegally buying and selling rhino horns, corruption and money.

Information generated from Project Broadbill led to [Project Blood Orange](#) which was set up to address the trafficking of rhino horns from the Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga to Gauteng. One of the focus areas was to address the illicit money flows and corruption associated with rhino horn trafficking.

On the 23 April 2022 the project team conducted its first integrated operation to address money laundering and corruption within the Kruger National Park focusing on the corrupt activities of Kruger National Park rangers. Three suspects were arrested which included two Kruger National Park field rangers from the Stolznnek area in the Intense Protection Zone, both rangers were dismissed after their arrest.

On the 2nd December 2022 the Project [team](#) consisting of the Mpumalanga HAWKS Serious Corruption Investigation Unit, the Serious Commercial Crime Investigation Unit, the Mpumalanga and Limpopo Serious Organised Crime Investigation Units, the HAWKS Tactical Response Team and the Local Criminal Record Centre conducted the final integrated operation in three provinces, four suspects were arrested and two suspects handed themselves in to the investigative team in Mpumalanga Province. Five suspects were arrested in Limpopo Province. A warehouse and residential address were searched in Gauteng Province, the owner of the house handed himself in to the HAWKS.

A total of thirteen individuals were arrested as part of Project Blood Orange. [According](#) to a statement by the HAWKS Priority Crime Inspectorate, two of the main accused, former game rangers Daniel Malueke and Solly Ubisi provided tactical information to rhino poaching syndicates in exchange for substantial sums of money which were transferred into the bank accounts of their family members.

Assassinations Linked to Rhino Poaching Investigations are Commonplace and Remain Unresolved in south africa 2022 – 2024

Chief Clyde Mnisi, Petros Mabuza and Joseph Nyalungu were arrested as part of the Project Broadbill operation in 2018. Operated by various special task forces from the South African Police Services and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, the project resulted in the arrest of no less than five police officers including a former SAPS Captain and station commander at Skukuza.

[Three](#) of the people arrested as part of Project Broadbill included Chief Clyde Mnisi who was granted bail of R50 000.00, Petros Mabuza who was granted bail of R90 000.00 and Joseph Nyalungu who was granted bail of R120 000.00. Joseph Nyalungu is currently the only survivor of the three accused men, the other two men have been assassinated.

Joseph Nyalungu was rearrested following a high-speed car chase and appeared in Hoedspruit Magistrates Court on 29th May 2023 following a joint intelligence operation conducted by the Limpopo Stock Theft Unit, the Hoedspruit police, Farm Watch, and the Community Policing Forum. [According](#) to media reports during the car chase another suspect jumped out of the vehicle, dropped a black bag and fled into the bush, the bag contained knives, a rifle and ammunition. Joseph Nyalungu crashed into another vehicle forcing him to stop, when his car was searched a stack of cash wrapped in plastic bag was allegedly found hidden under the back seat.

Joseph Nyalungu spent six months in custody until he was [granted bail](#) by Magistrate Sam Phakua in the Lenyenye Magistrates Court of R10 000.00 on the 7th December 2023. His case was postponed until the 22nd March 2024. Lenyenye is a township in the Greater Tzaneen Local Municipality of the Mopani District in Limpopo Province. According to the [SABC News](#) this matter was transferred from Hoedspruit to Tzaneen due to security concerns.

Petros Mabuza was sitting in his Ford Ranger double-cab utility vehicle parked in a parking bay near a petrol station and shops in Hazyview in Mpumalanga when, according to [reports](#) and security video evidence, three armed men opened fire on him on the 17th June 2021.

“Three armed suspects, who fled the scene in a black VW Polo, fired several shots at him, he was rushed to hospital where he later succumbed to the gunshot wounds.” [said](#) police spokesperson Brigadier Leonard Hlathi.

Brigadier Hlathi confirmed that Petros Mabuza had been previously arrested on several charges relating to rhino poaching and that the case was currently before the High Court.

Acting Mpumalanga Police Commissioner, Major General Thulani Phahla, [said](#): “No one has the right to take another person’s life, regardless of the reasons. We are optimistic that members of the community will share information with the police so that the perpetrators can be brought to book.”

Lieutenant Colonel Leroy Bruwer, an officer attached to the HAWKS Serious Organised Crime, Wildlife Trafficking Investigation team based in Mpumalanga Province was fatally shot on

the 17th March 2020 on the R37, a road connecting the towns Mbombela and Lydenburg in Mpumalanga Province. National head of the HAWKS Godfrey Lebeya [said](#) Bruwer was a

committed police officer who led the organised crime investigation unit and excelled. “We have lost one of our best.”

According to an official statement from the South African Police Services, the unravelling [investigation](#) into the murder of Lieutenant Colonel Leroy Bruwer has resulted in the revival of old cases which involve three people who appeared in the Nelspruit Regional Court on Tuesday 6th April 2021. Colonel Leroy Bruwer had allegedly been [investigating](#) Petros Mabuza, Clyde Mnisi and Joseph Nyalungu at the time of his assassination.

As previously stated, Clyde Mnisi and two co-accused were arrested during Project Broadbill for their [suspected](#) involvement in a rhino poaching syndicate which allegedly operated in Mpumalanga around the Kruger National Park, KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng. This syndicate [allegedly](#) “operated with almost military precision, its own intelligence operations and police officers in its ranks.”

Clyde Mnisi was [fatally](#) shot on the 26th March 2023 on the Airport Road in White River and his widow Charlene Felicity Mathews was [killed](#) when she was shot multiple times on the 4th April 2023 in their home.

Kwazulu Natal – The Current Rhino Battlefield, 2022 – 2024



KwaZulu Natal Province © EMS Foundation 2017

On Monday 22nd June 2020 ,CNN [published](#) a report about the southern white rhino pointing out that this species has been to the brink of extinction and back, but even as the species continues to be under threat from poachers, their survival today is largely thanks to the conservation of one park. Today most of the rhino in South Africa can trace their ancestry back to the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park in the KwaZulu Natal Province. Established in 1895, it is the oldest proclaimed reserve in Africa.

The rhinos living in the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park are not only being targeted by poachers their existence is being challenged by two coal mines on the north and east boundary. Kirsten Youens, founder and Chief Executive Director of All Rise, a non-profit organisation and registered law clinic for climate and environmental justice based in Durban in KwaZulu Natal, [published](#) an article in June 2022 about the negative effects that the coal mining onslaught on the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park which she described as ecocide.

Of major concern is that Southern Africa’s climate is changing rapidly as a result global warming. Recently [scientists](#) analysed the impact that climate change may have on rhinos. Rhinos because do not sweat and instead cool themselves off by bathing and finding shade. Rhinos are more sensitive to rising temperatures, which will quickly increase above the animals’ acceptable maximum threshold, i.e. the changes in temperature are greater than what the species can bear. Rhinos are therefore extremely vulnerable to the effects of climate change effects and threaten their very existence.

In July 2022, the South African official opposition political party, the Democratic Alliance in KwaZulu Natal Province, [urged](#) the South African government to urgently find R60 million to secure the future of Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife's flagship Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park.

The Democratic Alliance conservation portfolio committee oversight inspection had found that almost the entire park's western boundary fence spanning 93km is in extremely poor condition with 20km completely unfenced. A total of 162km of fencing was required to fully secure the park.

Heinz de Boer, the Democratic Alliance spokesperson on economic development, tourism and environmental affairs said the [dire security situation](#), which has persisted for years is unfortunately not limited to the Hluhluwe iMfolozi park. "While the park remains the hardest hit, there has also been a dramatic knock-on effect at all the KZN Ezemvelo facilities in terms of poaching, incursions and illegal activities. There were 259 illegal entries and poaching incidents across all Ezemvelo facilities between April 2021 and March 2022. Urgent representation must be made to Treasury to secure at least R40 million for smart animal-proof electrical fencing."

On the 22nd November 2022 an [open letter](#) addressed to President Ramaphosa was published in the media. The letter was written by Thuli Madonsela in which she readdressed the constitutionally questionable conduct which included the failure to fix the fence around the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park. "We have lost nearly 200 rhinos through poaching this year. And that is in the KwaZulu Natal parks alone."

The content of letter was publicly criticized by the Chairperson of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife for several important [inaccuracies](#) which included amongst other the details of compensation received by communities for farmed animal loss and claims that elephants are freely roaming outside the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park.

"Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park has been systemically torn apart by poachers and disgruntled community members for years, leading to several human fatalities as lions escaped. The National Department had been forced to step in because Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal Wildlife was unable to fix its fence." [said](#) Democratic Alliance member of the provincial legislature Heinz de Boer eight months later the 6th July 2023.

Economic Development, Tourism and Environmental MEC Siboniso Duma confirmed during a portfolio committee meeting that the national Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment would fund the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Game Reserve boundary fence where it is missing or damaged.

A month later in August 2023 it was confirmed that more than sixty percent of rhinos killed in South Africa were in the province of KwaZulu Natal. According to the rhino statistics for the first six months of 2023, 231 rhinos were killed in South Africa, [143 of these rhinos](#) were killed in reserves managed by Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

According to Minister Barbara Creecy a Tactical Operations Joint Control Centre had been established to facilitate the deployment of South African Police Service personnel to the Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park and the National Prosecuting Authority had also designated a dedicated prosecutor to facilitate rhino poaching cases in KwaZulu Natal.

In August 2023, Ezemvelo spokesperson Musa Mntambo [said](#) the organisation is not keen on dehorning their rhino. “The discussions are ongoing but to date the evidence we have is that dehorning in some of our protected areas did not prevent poaching. In fact, in one incident, poachers killed the dehorned rhino.

The park has a busy corridor road intersecting it, which makes it challenging to monitor all the vehicles driving through the park.”

In December 2023, the newly appointed CEO of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Sihle Mkhize, [agreed](#) to allocate more resources to bolster the efforts of game rangers. Recognizing these rangers as the unsung heroes, the department aims to boost their morale and improve their working conditions. In December a rhino poacher who was in the process of sawing off the horn of white rhino at the Hluhluwe iMfolozi park was arrested moments after he shot the rhino. During his arrest the park manager, Amos Khetha Tembe was injured and rushed to hospital.

“Our Field Rangers are tasked with working at night under all conditions and are under immense pressure and stress. Without their efforts, rhino poaching would be far worse. Their dedication and hard work are so important and should never be underestimate or taken for granted.” [said](#) Dirk Swart Section Ranger at Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park.



KwaZulu Natal Province © EMS Foundation 2017

Concluding Remarks

The [Integrity Testing Policy](#) was approved in January 2017 but have been stalled for many years during which time thousands of rhino have been killed. This Report has indicated the involvement of certain staff members at the Kruger National Park one high level investigation confirmed that intelligence was sold to syndicates about the intensive protection zones, supposedly designed to keep the rhino safe in the Kruger National Park.

[According](#) to Minister Creecy organised labour did not support the introduction of integrity testing, the policy was subsequently revised by SANParks management for consultation with organised labour in September. "It is recognised that were this policy to be implemented, it would require a change to employees conditions of employment."

To safeguard all endangered species and South Africa's biodiversity, including plants every single staff member employed by all National Parks and Provincial Conservation Agencies in South Africa whether a new employee or an employee with decades of employment history should have their contracts reviewed, renewed to include provision for integrity testing as a matter of priority.

Random follow up testing, searches of the staff members, their cars and their living quarters, if they live on site should form part of the integrity process and employment contract.

A similar practise should be considered and introduced to the South African Police Services personnel. The content of this report and the previous report titled [Where Have All the Rhinos Gone?](#) highlight the consistent involvement of some of South African Police Service personnel who are involved in corruption and organised crime.

It is unfortunate that the minority group of criminals impacts the lives of the majority. The honest South African will welcome and understand that this intervention is a necessary process and that it is not intended to be discriminatory.

The SANParks polygraph testing policy was [approved](#) by the board on the 23rd November 2023 and it was envisaged that the policy will be implemented in the fourth quarter of the 2022/2023 financial year. The polygraph testing standard operating procedure has also been developed to guide the implementation of the policy. A polygraph test committee will be established to guide and advise on the implementation process.

We trust that the National government is providing Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife with the financial support they require to safeguard the last stronghold of rhinos in South Africa.

Acknowledgement of Information Used from Various Media Entities

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