

# Investigation into the legalization of trade in rhino horn

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**A**t the 10th Meeting of CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) held in Harare, Zimbabwe during June 1997, the South African Game Organization (SAGO) supported the proposal of the South African delegation to amend the annotation of the Southern White rhino Ceratotherium simum simum.

The Proposal requested CITES to confirm the down-listing of the white rhino to Appendix 2, to support the investigation of the possibility of establishing bilateral trade in rhino horn and other products and a requested zero quota for the international trade in these products until the next Cites meeting.

The proposal was not approved by CITES although many countries were sympathetic towards the proposal. I don't think this should be regarded as a barrier for an in-depth investigation into a legal trade as proposed. A competent organization or Panel of Experts which includes game ranchers, conservationists, wildlife veterinarians and scientists, should be appointed to investigate methods for the control and legal sale of rhino horn.

## Privately owned

More than 20% of South Africa's total white rhino population are privately owned by game ranchers. They have invested millions of Rands in the conservation of South Africa's wildlife, natural heritage and resources. The legalization of a well-managed trade of rhino horn and harvesting rhino horn professionally on a sustainable basis, is supported by SAGO in an attempt to save South Africa's rhino population from the onslaught of poaching and illegal trade.

Despite the international ban by CITES on all trade in rhino products, rhino horn is still traded illegally especially in the Far East and Yemen. It is obvious that the ban has been unsuccessful. According to Chinese tradi-



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tional healers, buffalo and cattle horn are a poor substitute for rhino horn. The World Wildlife Fund estimated that 95% of Africa's black rhino population were wiped out between 1970 and 1994.

South Africa is the only country in Africa where good conservation methods have ensured a dramatic and substantial increase in white and black rhino populations. However, once the stockpiles used for traditional medicine become depleted, there will be an uncontrollable onslaught on South Africa's rhinos and the game rancher's animals will be placed in a perilous position.

For thousands of years traditional healers all over the world, including Africa, have used plants, herbs and animal parts for the treatment of human illnesses. The use of rhino horn in the Far East dates back for

several thousands of years. It has been established on good authority that rhino horn is used for reducing fever and is a cardiotonic in Traditional Chinese Medicine. ("Best of Traditional Chinese Medicine" by Xie Zhu Fan, Eastern Dragon Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1996.)

In the book "Chinese System of Natural Cures" by Henry C. Lu Ph.D., Sterling Publishing Co, New York, 1994 rhino horn is used for the treatment of strokes and epilepsy and approximately 3% of the formulae prescribed in this publication, contain rhinoceros horn as an ingredient. Although rhino horn is supposed to be a "banned product" in China and Korea, this does not seem to be the case.

The many thousands of traditional healers in these countries and Taiwan as well as in cities with Chinese populations worldwide, use rhino horn for the treatment of various ailments. Rhino horn is used in Yemen as an inlay for dagger handles.

The traditional medicinal needs of the Oriental people cannot be ignored or changed by laws and bans issued by CITES. When the stockpiles of rhino horn start dwindling in the Far East, South Africa's rhino will be targeted by poachers and the illegal trade will be as uncontrollable as it was in other African countries north of South Africa.

## Harvesting

Rhino horn can be harvested professionally and ethically from live rhino using experienced wildlife veterinarians. This is a unique, practical and constructive form of sustainable utilisation.

It is also recommended that educational programmes be used to inform traditional healers worldwide of the plight of the rhino and the conservation methods that are used in South Africa to save rhinos from extinction.