

THE RHINO AND ELEPHANT SECURITY COMMITTEE OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

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The Rhino and Elephant Security Committee of southern Africa (RESG) was established after a workshop at Treasure Beach in Durban, in 1989. Initially the group was known as the Rhino Management Group - Security Committee (RMG-SC) and was a sub-committee of the Rhino Management Group of South Africa. The RMG-SC was originally established, at that time, by only South African conservation and wildlife law enforcement officers, in an attempt to stem the tide of rhino (particularly black rhino) poaching, north of the Limpopo River and in Mozambique.

It soon became apparent that if South Africa

was to stem this poaching tide, we would have to bring in law enforcement and wildlife officers from the southern African range states that were being badly affected by rhino poachers. We needed to learn from their experiences if we were going to succeed south of that imaginary ecological barrier, the Limpopo River.

I was given the task by Nick Steele, former Chairman of the RMG-SC, of contacting the neighbouring range states and getting involved in the battle to stem the poaching. With South Africa still the political polecat of the world at that time, this was not an easy task. However,



with such a common goal, and conservationists being the strong willed people that we are, it was not too difficult to bridge the political gaps. We had a very worthwhile common cause and the will to protect the rhino in their last stronghold in Africa.

Initially, the approach adopted by the group did not adequately address the physical threat to rhino, both black and white. Furthermore, as we developed our thinking, it became very clear that if we were to be successful in our endeavours, we also needed to look to the protection of our elephant populations.

In view of this phenomenon, the RMG-SC expanded its mandate to include the protection of all rhino and elephant species. As a result, we renamed the organisation the Rhino and Elephant Security Group of southern Africa (RESG). We also became independent of the RMG, but as an organisation remained closely aligned to it. At this time, membership of the group included all the South African provincial conservation organisations, the Endangered Species Protection Unit (ESPU) and the relevant RSA NGO's, including AROA and EMOA. It also included the key southern African range states Zimbabwe, Zambia, Namibia (including the Protected Resource Unit of the Namibian police), Mozambique, Swaziland and Botswana (which included the Botswana Defence Force Anti-Poaching Unit).

As we progressed, it soon became apparent that if we were to be successful in our endeavours, a common purpose and direction had to be identified. Therefore, in February 1996, the group met to workshop a master plan for the security of rhino and elephant in southern Africa.

One aspect of the master plan is its dynamism. Obviously, with the rapid changes in the region, the plan needs to keep pace with changing regional circumstances, if it is to have the desired impact. It furthermore, needs to keep pace with the forces of political change and be ready to fit into the number of co-operative ventures which are emerging in the southern African arena. Conservation, wildlife management and protection measures must be part of

this change. The Lusaka Agreement and the draft South African Development Community (SADC) Wildlife Law Enforcement Protocol are two examples of what is happening within the region as far as collaborative efforts on wildlife protection. The RESG master plan fits in well with both these endeavours.

The SADC has, as part of its co-operative mandate, the Wildlife Technical Co-ordinating Unit (WTCU). This unit is based in Lilongwe, Malawi and is managed by the Director, Department of National Parks and Wildlife. In order to make the region aware of the master plan, I took it, albeit still in draft form, to the April 1996 WTCU meeting in Lusaka, Zambia. It was well received and at the time was unanimously accepted in principle. Now that the plan is complete, the WTCU will have to review the final document. It has, however, been used as a reference document by the consultants working on the draft Wildlife Law Enforcement Protocol for member states in the region.

The mission statement of the RESG is:

"To promote the security of rhino and elephant populations in southern Africa".

The RESG master plan has nine key aims, each of which has a set of objectives:

1. The facilitation and co-ordination of security activities of conservation organisations in southern Africa.

Co-operation, co-ordination, liaison of intelligence, security systems and the establishment of a centralised database for conservation organisations in the region are key elements of this aim.

2. The creation of a positive environment.

Here, positive media coverage, creating an awareness amongst politicians across the political spectrum and encouraging government support for the protection of rhino and elephant are key factors.

3. The improvement of staff management.

Key elements here consist of creating a core of dedicated staff to protect the species in





the field, standardising law enforcement training in the region, encouraging organisations to maintain good conditions of service for personnel dedicated to law enforcement work and maintaining them within this career path where their training, aptitude and knowledge can be retained to service the protection of rhino and elephant.

4. Co-operation with trade unions



With trade unionism having gained a foothold in conservation and wildlife organisations, it is essential that conservation management personnel encourage dialogue with their relevant trade unions in order for them to understand the importance of essential service status for law enforcement personnel. The personnel, apart from protecting rhino and elephant as well as the conservation estate generally, are also protecting valuable national assets.

5. Increasing the funding base.



As the funding base for conservation within the range states is shrinking, due to a multitude of factors, financial support for the protection of rhino and elephant is the key element for their longterm survival. Key elements are:



- where rhino and elephant are state assets in terms of the legislation, the state has a moral obligation to fund their protection. It must be acknowledged that these animals have both an economic and intrinsic value to the state and to conservation.
- the identification of suitable donors to fund specific projects for the protection of rhino and elephant, needs to be considered, and
- encouraging funding through the non-consumptive and if necessary, the sustainable consumptive use of rhino and elephant as a renewable resource.

6 The promotion of community involvement.



African conservation philosophies are

rapidly evolving to include communities, both in the management and benefits of wildlife management. The key elements here include, improving communications with communities adjacent to areas with rhino and elephant, encouraging an equitable distribution of the benefits derived from the protection and the use of these species and the transference of skills and capacity to communities, where this is feasible, to protect and manage their populations of rhino and elephant, should they have them in their areas.

7. The improvement of law enforcement co-ordination and co-operation within the southern African region.

Here the master plan advocates standardising, monitoring systems, the upgrading of co-ordinated protection measures, the creation of posts for dedicated wildlife prosecutors and co-operation between these people within the region. Establishing an effective system of international investigation in the region and the preparation of a standardised procedures manual for investigators.

8 Addressing the legal situation.

Due to many differences in the legislation within the regional range states, it is difficult to liaise when dealing with cross border crime. Key factors to improve this are, arranging for specialised regional training for prosecutors and investigators, the establishment of a liaison forum for these same people and the creation of a politically acceptable southern African protocol to work towards a form of uniform legislation for wildlife crime.

9. Addressing the legal trade in elephant and rhino products.

Concern has been expressed in many quarters that the opening up of the legal trade in rhino and elephant products, mainly horn and ivory, could have a detrimental effect on live animals, and indeed, promote

poaching. In addition, there appears to be cases where CITES permits are not correctly issued and monitored. Here the master plan advocates:

- that an independent assessment should be done into the effect of legal trade on the security of rhino and elephant in the region, before legal trade commences;
- that co-ordinated training for officers, who are responsible for the issuing of CITES permits, should be carried out in the region.

The promotion of the master plan has led to an unprecedented interest by some range states to re-introduce, particularly black rhino, into areas where they had previously occurred. This is a sensitive matter amongst those organisations that would have to be approached to supply the animals for new founder populations.

In this case habitat suitability is not the main criteria - security, protection and overall management of the new animals is. Therefore, it is

imperative as far as the RESG is concerned, that a security, or threat analysis, is completed and as a result, actions to protect the new animals implemented before they are introduced.

There is absolutely no doubt that the Rhino and Elephant Security Group and our master plan for the security of rhino and elephant in southern Africa, has had an impact in the region. Through the collective wisdom of professional individuals within the southern African range states, we have made governments, organisations and individuals aware that protecting our priority species such as rhino and elephant, needs the participation and support of all countries in the region. It is just not feasible, nor indeed desirable, to stand alone any more. We have also pointed out that it is not just guns and men on the ground that matter. Although these are the frontline troops, they are also the last line of defence in stopping the rapid decline of these species.



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