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EAZA Statement in response to the proposed translocation of Northern White rhino

This statement is the second official statement of EAZA in relation to the proposed translocation of Northern White Rhino, currently held in Dvur Kralove Zoo, to a reserve in Kenya. It replaces the statement from August 2009, and changes are due to new information being available. No other written communications on this matter are official EAZA statements.

EAZA recognises that all the parties involved in the recent discussions have the goal of conserving a threatened sub-species/species and that all have the best interests of species conservation at heart. It also recognises that with finite resources disagreements over proposed conservation actions can become polarised.

EAZA understands that the proposal to transfer some of the Northern white rhinos held in Dvur Kralove Zoo to Ol Pejeta Ranch in Kenya now has the aim of conserving as much adaptive NWR genetic material as possible with the ultimate aim of reintroducing this genetic material back into secure areas of former range. This would be achieved through inter-crossing or hybridizing in Kenya with Southern white rhinos.

EAZA additionally recognises that in the history of attempts to conserve the NWR many millions of dollars have been spent, yet intensive poaching in their natural range has led to this difficult situation.

EAZA accepts that the Dvur Kralove Zoo, the owners of the NWR in question, have the right to make the ultimate decision as to whether or not this proposed translocation takes place. However EAZA does not endorse this move for the following reasons;

- The ultimate goal of inter-crossing or hybridizing NWR with SWR has not been fully articulated. The results of such an undertaking are unpredictable and EAZA does not believe that any significant conservation benefits will accrue;
- The taxonomic status of the NWR is still under discussion and therefore inter-crossing or hybridization decisions are being made without the relevant clarity of information. Prof. Colin Groves has informed IZW that he will publish a scientific paper (Groves *et al* in press) indicating that he believes the NWR to be a separate species from the SWR. If this is the case inter-crossing or hybridization would be inappropriate, particularly with respect to the welfare of any resulting off-spring and/or their fertility;
- EAZA supports on-going discussions between the varied parties and Robert Hermes of the IZW Berlin and encourages the production of a plan to maximise the potential for successful breeding of NWR using assisted reproduction technologies, including the collection and storage of all relevant samples in the future. However it does not believe that this is best achieved in Kenya. In addition while EAZA supports research and investigation it urges all parties to consider the considerable costs which may be better directed to assisting conservation of more viable species;
- EAZA supports the main tenants of the International Rhino Foundation and Save the Rhino International joint statement, in particular concerning the possible resulting impacts of diversion of funds from other critically threatened but more viable rhino populations.

Therefore EAZA would like to see the following;

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- A formulated plan for immediate action to conserve NWR genes through technologies such as cryobanking and involving additional colleagues, such as IZW and *The Frozen Ark* project, if appropriate;
- A formulated plan for assisted reproduction with the NWR in Dvur Kralove (involving components such as re-establishing cycling in the young females to facilitate natural conception and in addition AI) but with careful consideration as to the costs and likelihood of success;
- A confirmation from Dvur Kralove to undertake any necessary actions with regard to assisted reproductive technologies and/or to make their NWR available for such activities carried out by a third party;
- In case Dvur Kralove does not feel at this time that this can be undertaken at their facility a discussion on the possible movement of the Dvur Kralove NWR to another suitable centre in Europe willing to invest in appropriate facilities and the intensive management that will be required for all of the above must be undertaken.

Simon Tonge (Chairman of EAZA)

Bengt Holst (EEP Committee Chairman)

Lesley Dickie (Executive Director of EAZA)

20th October, 2009