

In search of answers to rhino poaching crisis

South Africans from all walks of life put their heads together at a parliamentary briefing last week to brainstorm solutions to the worsening rhino poaching crisis, writes **Legalbrief**.

Concerned individuals and organisations from civil society made a total of 14 submissions to Parliament's Water and Environmental Affairs Committee. A report on the **iafrica.com** site notes that the submissions suggested that rhinos were being let down in at least three ways: a lack of funding, weaknesses in law enforcement and loopholes in the system. Wilderness Foundation CEO Andrew Muir said it would cost roughly R25 000 a year to adequately protect a rhino from poachers. He said it was clear that the state would have to find the funds to help rhino task team enforcement units and provincial conservation agencies. The foundation's suggestion was to research the trade in horn from rhinos which had died of natural causes. The World Wildlife Fund African rhino manager Dr Joseph Okori said many people saw the legalisation of rhino horn trade as a 'silver bullet'. The Southern African Development Community rhino management group suggested the re-establishment of environmental courts. The group's head, Mike Knight, said an increase in the successful prosecution and sentencing of couriers, buyers and exporters would act as a deterrent. The Eastern Cape Tourism Agency said loopholes in the system should be identified and closed, including the acquisition of horn through legal hunting. A concerned individual, Terry Bengis, said the only solution was to place a moratorium on rhino trade, transport, hunting and anything else that would affect the local population. A group of four conservationists argued that a solution was to address the cause of poaching rather than the symptoms of poaching. A Rhino Reality awareness and education campaign aimed at Asian countries would help reduce the demand of rhino horn for medicinal purposes, said Galeo Saintz, Zama Ncube and Simon and Jon Morgan, according to the report. [Full report on the iafrica.com site](#)

The crime was grossing about R160bn annually, said the department's Deputy Director-General on Biodiversity and Conservation, Fundisile Mketeni. He noted that between 2009, 2010 and last year, 122; 333, and 448 rhinos were poached respectively. He projected that about 300 rhinos were likely to be poached this year. According to a report on the **BuaNews** site, he highlighted that the North West and Limpopo provinces have the highest numbers of poached rhinos. Mketeni said that most of the poached rhino horns were destined for Asian countries such as Vietnam, Thailand and China. He indicated that SA was at various stages of signing bilateral agreements with these countries to combat the crime. Mketeni complained about a lack of co-ordination between his department and its provincial counterparts as well as other related departments in dealing with problems. He called for his department to be given centralised powers which would allow them to decisively deal with the matter, according to the report. [Full report on the BuaNews site](#)

*A report in **The Times** notes that committee chair Johnny de Lange said it was unacceptable to say certain rhino strategies were being blocked by individuals, departments, laws and regulations.* 'If the provinces are not doing it properly and if it's a question of a species dying then there may be some instances where the power will be better served at a central level; and the Constitution allows for that,' he said. [Full report in The Times](#)

Port officials are not adequately checking wildlife shipments for illegal rhino horns, the committee heard, according to a report on the **News24** site. Mketeni notes his department's 'own facility' - ports of entry are currently the domain of Home Affairs - is planned for OR Tambo International Airport and at a yet-to-be-identified seaport. Mketeni said some officials wrongly accepted excuses or threats, meaning a consignment had left the country without proper inspection. Travellers often threatened to sue officials if they opened their boxes, he said. De Lange said it was shocking that people were getting away with such acts. De Lange said the system had flaws and should be tightened up. [Full report on the News24 site](#)

Hunters from certain countries should be refused permits to hunt rhinos in SA if their laws cannot guarantee their trophies will remain in their possession, Parliament was told. A **Business Day** report says that at issue is the fact that the rhino horn is more valuable than the cost of shooting a live animal. This has seen a growth in so-called 'pseudo' hunters who legally hunt a rhino only to sell the horn on the black market once they return home. A report in **The Times** notes that according to Global Rhino Ultimatum, 69% of rhino trophy hunting is a front for illegal trafficking and trading in horns. Wildlife groups estimate the private and government stockpiles to be between 10 000 kg and 12 000 kg, worth about \$600m, the report notes. De Lange called on the government to deal severely with private reserve owners who were resisting attempts to regulate canned hunting, according to the report which

says some of the regulations include inserting microchips in trophy horns to monitor their movements and a requirement that state wildlife experts be present during hunting. [Full Business Day report](#) [Full report in The Times](#)