

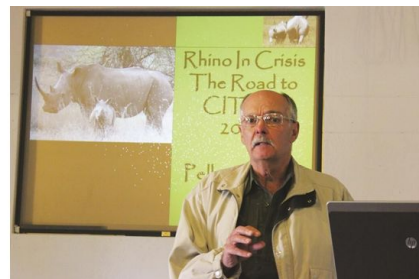


## Rhino owners blame lack of political will

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As rhino poaching in Namibia is increasing dramatically, concerned rhino owners yesterday gathered at Okahandja to launch a new organisation focusing on the protection of the rhino. However, debate was sparked about the government's involvement and the legalisation of trading in rhino horn. One of the issues raised by rhino owners was the fact that the organisation was not driven by the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and that there seemed to be a lack of involvement from the ministry's side. Rhino owner Johan Kotze expressed his frustration with the government and said that the meeting should have been organised by the government. "The political will is not there. This should have been organised by the State. Why is the State not doing anything?" He said the owners themselves do not even know when a poaching incident

happens, but have to read it in the media. Kotze further said that if the government is not providing support to owners of white and black rhino, it puts the owners at risk. He said if the government is not willing to give support to the custodians of black rhinos the government should remove the rhinos from their farms. "If you don't come to the party, take your stuff and leave. We have to look after your black rhinos, but there is no support from the State." Pelham Jones from the Private Rhinos Association of South Africa, who was a speaker at the launch, said in response that as custodians of black rhinos the owners have undertaken to protect the species even though there is no support from government. He stressed that the rhino owners should not count on support from the government, but protect the animal as conservationists. Some of the other rhino owners felt the same way and said that they did not agree to take care of the black rhinos for the government for profit or any other financial gain. Kotze further said if the government is not part of this organisation it would not get off the ground. "We will not be able to provide military training and have guns. They must be part of this to understand what we are doing otherwise this will never be a reality." Agreeing with him, one of the owners said that they felt that the custodians of black rhinos and private rhino owners are confused and uninformed about to what extent they are responsible for the protection of the State's property. "We feel sidelined and there should be specific guidelines on where we find ourselves." Some rhino owners asked whether it is sustainable for them to continue keeping the endangered animals on their farms if they personally had to protect the animals against poachers.



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