

Nam de-horns rhinos in battle against poachers

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by Staff Reporter



CABINET has approved the Ministry of Environment and Tourism's proposal to de-horn rhinos in Namibia.

Environment ministry spokesperson Romeo Muyanda confirmed that Cabinet has given its stamp of approval to the ministry to begin de-horning rhinos as part of its overall anti-poaching strategy.

Last week, minister Uahekua Herunga pointed out that while the number of rhinos poached over the past 10 years in Namibia was considered low at a total of 10, so far in 2014 at least 14 rhinos have been killed by poachers.

Herunga said that the ministry is "concerned about the current illegal hunting of wildlife in the country ..." and that the illegal activities "clearly need to be rapidly brought under control".

According to the Ministry, de-horning will commence in high-risk areas, including Kunene and Omusati regions on the border with Angola.

The de-horning process includes anaesthetising the rhino and the removal of the horn with a chainsaw or hacksaw. Depending on re-growth rates, the rhino will have to be captured and put under anesthesia again to repeat the procedure at regular intervals. Despite the optimism that rhino de-horning is a sturdy anti-poaching strategy, concerns have been raised internationally and locally in regard to its overall effectiveness. According to Save the Rhino International, rhinos de-horned in Zimbabwe appeared "to have a 29,1% higher chance of surviving than horned animals".

The organisation noted that while de-horning removes the majority of the horn, the stub that remains is still a valuable target for poachers. According to reports, it is estimated that rhino horn on the black market in Vietnam fetches at least U\$100 000 per kilogramme, leading many conservationists to worry that even a remnant of horn is worth the risk of capture for poachers.

Research has shown that while de-horning rhinos removes approximately 90% to 93% of horn mass, the remaining horn presents sufficient motivation for poachers to kill a rhino and remove the horn nub.

Save the Rhino International cautions that de-horning “must be coupled with extensive anti-poaching security and monitoring efforts. With an absence of security, rhinos may continue to be poached regardless of whether they have been de-horned”.

In addition to de-horning, the ministry is focusing on training and equipping a dedicated anti-poaching unit consisting of at least 300 law enforcement officers, who will be dispersed to poorly monitored rhino hotspots.

The ministry is also considering implementing drone surveillance as a monitoring tool in the war against poachers.