

## Rhino trust staff not involved in poaching

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**AN independent investigator found no evidence of suspicions of any of the Save the Rhino Trust Namibia (SRT) staff being involved in poaching, according to an official SRT statement released on Wednesday.**

Last December the SRT launched an internal investigation in response to newspaper reports that alleged that its staff was involved in rhino poaching in the Kunene region.

According to the statement, an investigator and assistant spent over two months investigating. This involved extensive travelling and interviews.

The results of the report, which was shared with the SRT trustees and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism, showed that SRT CEO Simson Uri-Khob was “categorically cleared” of any involvement in rhino poaching, and that he did not withhold information about poaching, but instead passed all relevant information to the Namibian police's protected resource unit (PRU).

No evidence of any of SRT staff being involved in poaching was found, neither was any evidence found to suggest that the 'Camel Team' was involved in poaching.

“The investigator examined deeds of sale and bank statements that clear SRT staff from allegations that they purchased vehicles, using money acquired by suspicious means such as poaching,” read the statement.

It stated that certain staff members have apparently been intimidated by criminal syndicates and/or the local community, which may have resulted in suspicions of information about poaching being withheld. These staff members have been identified and "recommendations will be followed".

The investigation further revealed a great deal of evidence unrelated to SRT that was passed to the PRU who is still actively working on all leads.

Furthermore, according to the official statement, the investigation gathered invaluable intelligence about the poaching syndicates that will help SRT to respond to the poaching threat in future.

"Given the scope of the results to date and the current environment where poachers are operating in the area, the SRT board of trustees has secured funding to increase the investigator's remit and will continue to develop knowledge about poaching in Kunene in order to direct SRT patrol efforts and other initiatives," the statement read.