



Etosha killing fields: Park staff to be probed

06 May 2015 | Environment

The probe into poaching in the Etosha National Park, where 54 rhino carcasses have been found this year alone, will include investigating rumours of the possible involvement of park staff and management. "Everything will be investigated and no stone will be left unturned. I have already seen two problems and that is the negligence of staff and the other suspicions could be very serious," said Environment and Tourism Minister Pohamba Shifeta. Shifeta said DNA testing will be conducted on the more than 50 rhino carcasses that have been found in Etosha since the beginning of the year. This DNA evidence will be given to international law-enforcement organisations which will be able to track the rhino horns when they are sold. The rumours that staff and management may be involved follow the recent discovery of several new carcasses in Etosha.



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/asse>)

Some were found close to game wardens' houses. Shifeta said he was not happy with the staff and management at Etosha. "They are either negligent or sleeping. I cannot understand how this can happen in close proximity of their camps. How can someone just loot while our staff is there and no one is aware of anything. This is negligence or they are not doing their job as they should." Shifeta said immediate action would be taken to address the situation in Etosha. "I want action now." Shifeta said he was aware of rumours that Etosha staff and certain members of its top management might be involved in poaching and added that staff negligence is a major problem in the park. According to Shifeta he is awaiting a detailed report on all the rhino carcasses found in Etosha, which will give more detailed information on the cause of death, when and how they died and exactly where. He said this information would hopefully provide them with more leads on the poaching occurring in the park. A high-level ministerial delegation is visiting Etosha at the moment and it has been holding meetings with the relevant authorities and park officials to provide more feedback to the minister on the situation. Just last week, law-enforcement authorities were also at Etosha to assess the situation. Shifeta said ballistic tests will be done on the rhino carcasses that have been shot. He explained that from the ballistic evidence, the ministry is hoping to create a database and link the evidence to the firearms that were used. "We want to record all this information with regard to the bullets so that if we come across illegal rifles we will be able to link them to the poaching." He said some of the rhino carcasses found this year were fresh, meaning that they died this year. Some of the carcasses still had horns and could have died from natural causes. Shifeta said ministry officials have been busy with more intensive aerial patrols in Etosha and have been able to find more rhino carcasses in the park, even in dense bush. The minister said the aerial patrols have to be careful to avoid counting carcasses twice. He said this means that when a carcass is detected from the air, a team is dispatched on foot to mark it. He stressed that rhino poaching is a lucrative transnational crime. According to him, a rhino horn can fetch up to N\$600 000 per kg and the money is used to finance other criminal activities. Shifeta said when a rhino is poached, its DNA is recorded and provided to international organisations. Therefore, when a person tries to sell the horn internationally or is arrested with the horn, they will know it is a Namibian horn, he said. The total number of rhino carcasses that have been discovered in Namibia this year is 59. Five rhino carcasses were discovered earlier this year in the Kunene Region. WINDHOEK ELLANIE SMIT