



Kunene Region winning the battle against poaching

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The Kunene Region has been free of rhino poaching for nearly five months.

This was revealed by Save the Rhino Trust (SRT) Namibia chief operating officer, Dr Axel Hartmann, during a debate about legalising the trade in rhino horns in Namibia. He said last week the region had not experienced any rhino poaching for 150 days. Hartmann says poaching incidents had recently become worrisome and the SRT realised they needed to adapt their programmes and the way they monitored rhinos. According to him, one of the major challenges was patrolling 25 000 square kilometres of very rugged terrain. Hartmann says foot patrols currently cover about 30 to 40km per day, while one of the problems identified was the predictability of these patrols. "We changed our patrols to become more unpredictable and also included other initiatives, such as bringing traditional authorities on board." He stressed that the trust is working in close co-operation with community game wardens, the Ministry of Environment and Tourism and special field force. He further said that since the poaching crisis in 2014, all efforts have focused on proactive patrolling. Since April, more regular patrols have been carried out, Hartmann said. He says critical evaluation is necessary to identify what the strong and weak points are. "We will have to adapt, and collaboration is essential." He stressed the need to rekindle instilling pride in the community to view rhinos as national assets. "If we can cultivate that mentality that this is ours and we will not allow anybody here to take it, we will have the boots on the ground that is necessary." Kenneth Uiseb the acting director of Scientific Services at the Ministry of Environment and Tourism says the complex and international nature of rhino poaching is not easy to deal with. "There are no deterrents in place for illegal hunting of rhinos," Uiseb said. He said resources are required to offer effective protection to rhinos in Namibia, especially in communal area conservancies and on freehold land. "The long-term survival of the rhino is in our hands, we must join hands in the fight against rhino poaching." Uiseb says the level of law-enforcement must be strengthened and kept high. According to Uiseb, meta-population management of rhinos must be enhanced and encouraged, and innovative approaches to increase rhino conservation as a sustainable form of land use, must be explored. WINDHOEK ELLANIE SMIT