

Concern over release of poachers as three are arrested with rhino horns

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by Tuyeimo Haidula



DEPUTY minister of environment Tommy Nambahu has repeated his stance that the release of suspected rhino poachers is hampering the ministry's efforts to fight the scourge.

He was speaking at the handover of a dixie and cutlery set valued at N\$10 000 for anti-poaching activities by Bushwhackers on Friday.

On the same day Nambahu raised concern, three men were arrested with freshly sawn off rhino horns at a roadblock just outside Otavi in the Otjozon-djupa region.

Nambahu said government's funding is limited, hence their appreciation of efforts from the private sector.

He stated that the ministry does not support the granting of bail to alleged poachers, and implored investigating teams and prosecutors to carefully analyse the excuses that many come up with when they are arrested because most are invalid.

"We do not want excuses of 'you being the breadwinner or that your girlfriend or wife is pregnant'. Did she only get pregnant after you poached? You should have thought about those things before deciding to go poaching," he stressed.

The latest released suspects are Amon Namwandi (32), known as 'Mox', and Jairus Shaalukeni (32). The two were released on bail following their arrest during an undercover sting operation on 14 June, after a week behind bars.

They were caught with four rhino horns in their possession. The origin of the horns has not been confirmed, although it was reported that they were still fresh and "bloody". Namwandi and Shaalukeni were released on N\$50 000 bail each about two weeks ago.

Environment minister Pohamba Shifeta has echoed similar concerns that the release of suspected rhino poachers was a 'headache' to the ministry, and that prosecutors and investigators should improve communication between the two arms of justice.

Shifeta also said investigators and legal teams should consider the work and time invested in making these arrests.

The arrest of the three on Friday evening was confirmed by Otjozondjupa police spokesperson Maureen Mbeha yesterday.

Mbeha said the men had two large and one small rhino horns.

She said the Otavi police chased the white Toyota double-cab in which the suspects were travelling after it failed to stop.

As the police were catching up on them, one of the suspects threw out the bag with the rhino horns.

Police managed to stop the vehicle, but two of the five occupants jumped out and fled into the bush.

The remaining three men, including the driver, were arrested.

Police found a camping tent, blankets, containers of water, tinned food, seven live bullets for a 303 hunting rifle and a loaded 9 mm pistol in the car.

The police suspect the men had just returned from a poaching trip, as the rhino horns were still fresh.

The three, aged 27, 29 and 33, are facing a charge of the possession of controlled wildlife products. They will appear in the Otavi Magistrate's Court today.

- additional reporting by Nampa

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