

N\$25m or 20 years for illegal wildlife sales

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ANYONE found illegally selling controlled wildlife will be fined N\$25 million instead of the current N\$20 000, while jail time which is five now goes up to 20 years.

Those found in possession of controlled wildlife products, according to the proposed amendments, should pay N\$15 million instead of the current N\$20 000 or spend 15 years in jail unlike now when the incarceration period is just five years

In addition, the proposed law will increase fines for people who don't comply with the law regulating the possession and selling of wildlife from N\$8 000 to N\$100 000, while jail time will be going up from two to 10 years.

These are some of the amendments environment minister Pohamba Shifeta proposed when he tabled the Controlled Wildlife Products and Trade Amendment Bill in the National Assembly last week.

"The current penalties for wildlife trade and possession crimes are not sufficient deterrents, especially taking into account that trade and possession often involve foreign kingpins who are able to easily pay their way out of these fines," he stressed.

Shifeta said organised crime syndicates are involved in the trafficking of rhino horns and elephant tusks by using complex networks leading to foreign markets.

"The current levels of illegal trade and wildlife trafficking promote corruption, threaten peace and stability, strengthen illicit trade routes and destabilise our economies," he added.

According to him, 135 elephant tusks and pieces and 36 rhino horns were captured by authorities in 2016.

Twenty one elephant tusks and four rhino horns were confiscated by the state this year.

"This year alone, Namibia has also been implicated in two seizures of rhino horns, effected in South Africa and Hong Kong," he said.

The minister said the proposed law also plans to ban foreign nationals involved in crimes related to the possession and dealing in elephant and rhino products after they serve their prison terms.

This was because the majority of culprits found guilty of illegal wildlife trading are foreign nationals.

The proposed changes to the law that guides the fines and prison terms come at a time when the government is battling with containing illegal wildlife killers, who sell products to markets such as China.

The latest bill is a follow-up to changes to the law which were passed in parliament earlier this year.

The ministry also increased the fine related to poaching of all other specially protected species from the current maximum of N\$20 000 to N\$10 million, and the imprisonment period from five to 10 years.