



Anti-poaching unit in limbo

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The environment ministry's anti-poaching unit has been in limbo for four years, awaiting budget allocations for appointments.

Ministry spokesperson Romeo Muyunda confirmed yesterday there have been no new recruitments to the unit since retired police commissioner Ndahangwapo Kashihakumwa was officially appointed as its head on 1 August last year.

At that stage Kashihakumwa and seven other members were appointed to the vital unit.

Muyunda said due financial constraints the ministry has been unable to recruit anyone else to the unit, which will eventually consist of nearly 500 members.

According to him, the budget for this financial year has also not made provision for any further recruitments.

Muyunda said the ministry is therefore engaging other line ministries in an effort to address the problem and see how the situation can be remedied.

"This is not the situation we desire. Poaching is a huge challenge for the country and the ministry is doing everything possible to eliminate it."

He stressed if the ministry can start recruiting in phases, as money becomes available, it will already make a huge difference, as there are currently no rangers or "ground people" for the anti-poaching unit.

Muyunda was unable to confirm what the total cost will be for the recruitment of 500 unit members.

Tourism minister Pohamba Shifeta said in 2015 that as soon as the 2015/16 ministry budget was approved the anti-poaching unit will be finalised and set up.

Cabinet had previously approved the reorganisation of existing ministry staff, so a dedicated anti-poaching unit could be set up.

Particularly, the Directorate of Wildlife and National Parks was reorganised to create the anti-poaching unit.

This was approved by the Public Service Commission, with a staff structure consisting of 495 staff members.

This anti-poaching unit, referred to as the Division: Wildlife Protection Services, was established to provide active patrols, surveillance, investigations, on-the-job training and retraining, communication and adaptive management.

Specific functions of the division include protecting wildlife, mainly rhino and elephant, from poaching. It also promotes the enforcement of wildlife laws in the country and with neighbouring states. It will also strengthen law-enforcement and better prepares the ministry to deal with wildlife poaching syndicates.



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/assets/poaching-unit-in-limbo2018-07-120.jpg>)

SLOW PACE: The national anti-poaching unit has been in limbo for about four years. Photo: NWR

The division further conducts arrests, seizures and facilitates the proper collection of crime scene evidence, in collaboration with other law-enforcement agencies.

Meanwhile, the Draft National Strategy on Wildlife Protection and Law Enforcement 2016 to 2020 has highlighted the fact that Namibia lacks at least half the resources required to effectively face the serious and escalating poaching threat. This includes financial resources, manpower and equipment.

It said Namibia needs to be well-prepared to deal with threats to its rhino and elephant populations and other wildlife species, in the light of recent trends elsewhere in Africa, and particularly those in neighbouring countries.

“Wildlife crime in Namibia has reached a new quality of violence and an enhanced frequency of incidences. Well-organised gangs enter vulnerable areas and crime syndicates organise the trafficking of horns and tusks through complex networks, leading to foreign markets.”

Poaching statistics provided by the ministry indicated that by April this year a total of 14 rhinos and 23 elephants have already been poached.

Last year 35 rhinos and 23 elephants were killed by poachers. In 2016 a total of 60 rhino were poached, while in 95 rhino were poached in 2015 and 56 rhino in 2014.

In 2016, a total of 101 elephants were poached, while 49 elephants were poached in 2015 and 78 in 2014.

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