



## N\$10k per day to keep a rhino

### Shifeta laments dwindling trust fund

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Environment minister Pohamba Shifeta has again spoken up about the drawbacks for Namibia of not being able to sell its ivory and rhino horn stockpiles.

According to Shifeta it costs more than N\$10 000 per day to keep a rhino. "Yet you are not allowed to sell rhino horns legally. Now farmers are giving up."

With dwindling funds flowing into the Game Products Trust Fund that supports activities and programmes in conservation and poaching and human-wildlife conflict, Shifeta said selling these stockpiles would make more income available.

"Namibia is able to benefit from both its rhino and elephant resources. Now it is just standing here."

Shifeta explained that a proposal was already been made to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) to sell the country's ivory stockpiles.

Shifeta further elaborated on how expensive it has become for rhino owners and custodians to keep rhinos on their farms.

"Rhino farmers are giving up and selling their animals, yet they are not allowed to trade in rhino horns to get some income."

Arguments have however been if legal trade is allowed that this will fuel poaching.

However, Shifeta countered this saying that as long as there is a demand for rhino horn there will be poaching. "The only thing to close the market is when you do not have a rhino with horns."

He referred to the recent case in South Africa where the world's largest private rhino breeder, John Hume, faced financial collapse this year, putting his more than 1 600 rhinos on the market.

Hume's eventually held an online auction of rhino horns to capitalise on a court ruling that paved the way for domestic trade despite the international ban imposed to curb poaching.

#### Domestic trade

A moratorium on buying and selling rhino horn within South Africa has been in place since 2009, but in 2015 Hume and another rhino horn breeder filed a suit to overturn it. A final court ruling opened the way for domestic trade to begin again, although the ban on the international trade, established in 1977, remains in place.

Also, a South African businessman Piet Warren was until recently the owner of the second-largest privately owned population of rhino in South Africa with about 250 animals, but was recently forced to sell more than half of these due to financial constraints.

At a Cites convention in October 2016, Namibia and Zimbabwe each made a proposal to open up ivory markets, but were



(<https://d3rp5jatom3eyn.cloudfront.net/assets/per-day-to-keep-a-rhino2018-08-300.jpg>)  
VALUABLE RESOURCE: Namibia is keen to sell its ivory and rhino horn stockpiles in a bid to fund conservation projects. PHOTO: FILE

soundly defeated with a coalition of African states which opposed it and tabled a proposal to have ivory trade banned permanently.

At that time Namibia's stockpile stood at about 62.9 tons of legal and illegal ivory with a collective value of N\$341.2 million.

The stockpile included 26.05 tons of legal ivory retrieved when animals died naturally, were put down for being problematic or shot in trophy hunting. The remaining 36.85 tons of illegal ivory were confiscated in police operations. The stockpile would have increased substantially since then with poaching numbers which remained high last year.

#### Bureaucratic delays

Furthermore, the Decision Making Mechanism (DMM) for future trade in ivory was also abandoned at the Cites meeting, after nine years of discussion. Namibia, South Africa, and Botswana all recommended the Cites parties to adopt a DMM.

However an organisation selling ivory failed to garner approval by the parties, particularly because the ivory ban is in place.

Without the DMM for future ivory trade, Namibia will still be required to go back to the Cites Conference of the Parties with proposals to trade in ivory and those proposals will, in all likelihood, be rejected.

Imposed since 1989, the ivory ban is enforced in a way that Namibia, Botswana, South Africa and Zimbabwe can request permission for auctions due to their large elephant populations which received less protection than those from other African countries.

The ban was in mid-2007 temporarily lifted for the four African States and 107 tons of ivory was auctioned under strict Cites supervision. The ban was also temporarily lifted in 1997.

Failure to establish the DMM has undermined the generation of revenue from the sale of elephant products to finance elephant conservation programmes, including the management of protected areas and the combatting of illegal killing and trade.

The next Cites meeting takes place in 2019 when it is expected that Namibia will again propose the selling of its stockpiles.

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