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Poaching is a general problem in Namibia. Snares, among other things, are also often collected on the Ameib guest farm. Photo: Claudia Reiter

- **ENVIRONMENT**

FIGHT AGAINST POACHING INTENSIFIED

Environment Minister Pohamba Shifeta: "Something like this must never happen again"

Following the shocking discovery last week of 11 black rhinos being poached in Etosha National Park, the Ministry of Environment, Tourism and Forestry is now taking action to change the way the Anti-Poaching Unit (AWE) operates.

Brigitte Weidlich Windhoek

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Brigitte Weidlich

Windhoek

"We have reorganized and made changes in the AWE," announced the minister yesterday at a press conference. The head of the AWE, Ndahangwapo Kashihakumwa is now in Etosha and will remain stationed there and will make some changes.

"Our people were too complacent. We also have to assume that staff may have likely passed information about the rhinos to the poachers, so an 'inside job'," the minister said.

The poachers would not come to the park without internal information because no rhinos had been poached in the last three to four years. "It's not the first time that something like this has happened, that staff (at the park) are in cahoots with poachers," Shifeta said.

Some of the rhinos were spotted just a few kilometers north of Dolomit Camp, a government rest camp in Etosha Park. The poachers are said to have entered at Okahao. According to Kenneth Kahuure, the parks and wildlife manager, some animals have also been poached in the southeast and east, the latter on the edge of the pan.

Two of the poachers were arrested after a shootout in the park last Wednesday after AWE members heard gunshots at their bush camp. This shows the audacity of the poachers for roaming so close to the camp. Three other suspects are still at large. "But we know who you are, your arrest is imminent," Shifeta said at a press conference yesterday. "We have to make sure that something like this never happens again." Minister Shifeta was in Etosha National Park over the weekend to find out more. He announced a complete clarification of the incident and wants to inform the public about progress in two weeks.

The AWE is made up of game wardens from the MEFT, soldiers and police officers and employees of the state secret service, the minister explained. The police officers would be changed every three months. It was noted that new arrivals were not given advance notice

of what was at stake and that 24 hour, seven day vigilance was required in the unit. Now the newcomers should be informed in advance about their obligations.