

Stock theft and poaching still manageable – top cop



TRAPPED ... The carcass of an eland trapped in a wire snare set. Photos: Contributed

By Adam Hartman

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DESPITE farmers' concerns that stock theft and poaching in the Erongo region's north-west district has reached crisis levels, Erongo police commander commissioner Nikolaus Kupembona says the challenges are manageable as long as strategies are put in place.

He says ongoing stock theft and poaching involve "isolated incidents".

"It starts with the farmers' own security measures. There are weekend farmers who maybe leave their houses in the care of their workers, and those are some of the issues we need to address."

The police last week met with commercial and communal farmers, as well as community leaders.

The aim of the meeting was to address farmers' concerns around stock theft and poaching, which have seen dozens of animals slaughtered and incurred millions of dollars of damage.

Statistics for 2023 indicate that Kalkfeld and Omaruru Farmers Association members indicate a total loss of N\$1 300 600, consisting of N\$636 300 in stock theft, N\$357 300 in poaching, and N\$307 000 in infrastructure damage, such as to water pumps, gates and fencing.

Omaruru Farmers' Association chairman Christian Traupe said these figures are likely an underestimate.

"Not all farmers are members of the association, and not all members report incidents, although we try to motivate them to do so.

“The real numbers will be double or triple, just to give you an idea of the economic impact it has on the farming community, of which the objective should be food production and security.”

Traupe referred to the heavy toll crime takes on farmers, saying he spends 60% of his work time on crime prevention.

Severe increases in illegal hunting, as well as stock theft and the stealing of water pumps and infrastructure were key points of discussion.

This not only jeopardises the livelihoods of farmers but also poses a threat to local food production and security, Traupe said.

Solutions proposed included better cooperation between farmers and the police, organising regular patrols, and encouraging farmers to be better organised among themselves.

Traupe said the meeting was attended by communal farmers from Omatjete and Okombahe, commercial farmers from Omaruru, Karibib and Wilhelmstal, resettlement farmers, plot owners and the Erongo Mountain Nature Sanctuary.

Other stakeholders included the Zeraua Traditional Authority, representatives of the Omaruru constituency and the Ministry of Environment, Forestry and Tourism, as well as the local public prosecutor.

“I experienced the meeting as very positive. There was no blame game between the police and farmers.

“Problems on the ground were discussed, and solutions were also presented,” said Traupe.

“We passed some resolutions, including plans by farmowners to intensify patrols. We also talked about the establishment of safety forums and neighbourhood watches,” Kupembona said.

He referred to other interventions like installing cameras along hotspots to deter theft and poaching, saying the farmers pledged to work together as a collective with all stakeholders.

“We also identified some areas where we need to intensify our patrols,” he said, noting that not only commercial farmers are affected, but also communal farmers.

Kupembona said it is not the police’s duty to patrol private farms, but farmowners’ responsibility.

“We all need to work together, especially in terms of securing our stock.”

Last week, Markus Trede of farm Lindholm between Omaruru and Omatjete said an eland had died after being caught in a poacher’s snare on his farm.

What makes the situation worse is the wastefulness of the poachers, who did not even take the meat, he said.

“Besides that, my farm had six head of cattle poached in the last two months,” he said, noting that oryx are now rare to find on his and neighbouring farms.

“This development is killing Namibia’s greatest asset – its wildlife and thus the tourism industry.”