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'Seized trafficked rhino horns under lock and key'

By Thobeka Ngema  5h ago



DURBAN – RHINO horns worth in excess of R230 million intercepted at the OR Tambo International Airport between July last year and February this year were being kept at a secure location, said Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) Barbara Creecy.

She was responding to written parliamentary questions submitted by the DA's David Bryant. He had asked about the whereabouts of the rhino horns and whether they had been destroyed.

Creecy said private security companies employed by Airports Company SA (Acsa) and the warehouse operators/ cargo handlers who were responsible for manning the X-ray machines, SA Revenue Service (Sars) Customs, the SAPS, Hawks and DFFE Environmental Management Inspectors were involved in the busts.

Between July last year and February this year, the Sars Customs Detector Dog Unit was instrumental in curbing four major rhino horn trafficking bids totalling R234 114 205.77. Collectively, the horns weighed 277.3kg.

Creecy said the seized horns were handled in line with the prescribed crime scene standard operating procedures. A chain of custody principle is followed and the seized horns were bagged, sealed and entered into the SAPS evidence register (SAPS 13). From there, they were taken for forensic examination and DNA sampling to be compared to the DNA samples in the national database. The horns were then kept in a secure location until the relevant court case

was finalised. Afterwards, the horns were moved to another central secure location for storage. "Confiscated rhino (horns) from stockpiles have not been destroyed. They are stored in a secure location," said Creecy.

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She said other seized rhino horn stockpiles were also kept locked up in secure locations. "The High-Level Panel set up to review existing policies, legislation and practices on matters related to the management, breeding, hunting, trade and handling of elephant, lion, leopard and rhinoceros recommended the department develop a stockpile management and disposal policy. This recommendation is currently under consideration."

She said 66 alleged poachers were nabbed in the Kruger National Park and 90 people were held for rhino poaching and rhino horn trafficking outside the park, and more than 25 major probes were undertaken.

Those recently found guilty were jailed for between five and 25 years.

RHINO HORN BUSTS:

FEBRUARY 4, 2021: The Detector Dog Unit selected a suspicious shipment destined to Malaysia, which was declared as HP Cartridges Developers. The three-piece shipment was scanned and images resembled the shapes of rhino horns. Upon physical inspection of the boxes, traditional clothing was found concealing 18 pieces of rhino horns, weighing 63kg and valued at R53 172 000.

DECEMBER 14, 2020: Another shipment from South Africa to Malaysia was intercepted by the Detector Dog Unit. An agent had dropped the shipment off without any documentation. Upon inspection, a geysers was found with new welding and freshly painted. Maize was used to conceal 17 pieces of rhino horns, weighing 72.4kg and valued at R61 137 777.77.

SEPTEMBER 30, 2020: Yet another shipment destined for Malaysia was declared as coffee beans but detector dog Roxy reacted to the shipment. Although coffee bean packets were found, they were concealing six pieces of rhino horns inside, weighing 4.9kg and valued at R4 135 600.

JULY 14, 2020: A consignment declared as fine art and destined for Kuala Lumpur via Doha was profiled and intercepted. Detector dog Roxy reacted to the package which was then physically examined. The consignment was made up of six boxes containing 41 pieces of rhino horns concealed with carbon paper and foil wrapped in traditional material. The 137kg horns were valued at R115 668 828.

All goods were handed over to the Hawks or SAPS for investigation. | South African Revenue Service

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