

**SOUTH AFRICA**

## Money laundering and wads of cash giving illegal wildlife traders the upper hand

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17 November 2021 - 08:00



Pangolins are currently the most trafficked mammal as their meat is considered a delicacy, their scales are used in traditional medicine and their skin processed into leather products.

*Image: Supplied*

Sophisticated methods of money laundering and the extensive use of cash are hampering organisations from tracing the flow of funds around illegal wildlife trade, according to a recent survey.

The South African Anti-Money Laundering Integrated Task Force (Samlit) released its report into the financial flows associated with illegal wildlife trade in SA on Tuesday.

“The methods of payment and laundering become more sophisticated higher up in the supply chain, and basic cash or barter trade happens at the lower level.

“It is not uncommon for the money flows associated with illegal wildlife trade (IWT) to be linked to other crimes, such as fraudulent documentation or paperwork, trade-based money laundering including over-, under-, or fictitious invoicing, as well as corruption to facilitate the inflow of funds into SA,” said the report.

It emphasised that wildlife and wildlife products from SA are in high demand globally, with China and other Asian countries representing the largest markets.

“Criminal networks have established a supply chain on the movement of illegal wildlife products through various stages, from source to poaching, and then through various transit points until reaching the consumer at its destination,” it said.

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Wildlife products most popularly traded out of SA include rhino horn, abalone, and pangolin, with ivory being moved through SA in transit to the East, with China and other Asian countries representing the largest markets.

Pangolins are the most trafficked mammal as their meat is considered a delicacy, their scales are used in traditional medicine and their skin processed into leather products.

“This IWT report is a critical body of work, which proves that collaboration is the only way to fulfil Samlit’s objectives to increase the efficiency and effectiveness in combating financial crime. We are also encouraged, as this report proves what is possible in the future.” said Xolisile Khanyile, Samlit steering committee chair.

Corrupt officials or politically influential people did not appear in the reports, despite being major facilitators in IWT, said the survey.

**TimesLIVE**

