



WEEKEND ARGUS NEWS

# Corruption aids rhino horn smuggling



*Sandile, a male lion, gets released at Lionsrock Big Cat Sanctuary in Bethlehem, one of 10 lions rescued by Four Paws from inappropriate conditions near Johannesburg. Picture: Four Paws*

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**Cape Town - The Wildlife Justice Commission said a threat assessment on the state of rhino horn trafficking in the past decade**

## showed that much was needed to fight the trade via law enforcement, policymakers and conservation.

This is to prevent the extinction of rhinos as poaching grows.

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The assessment found that over the last decade, six countries dominated the supply chain as source, transit and destination locations and that a third of rhino horns were smuggled unconcealed, suggesting a potential reliance on corruption to move shipments along the supply chain.

They found that large amounts of harvested horns have been diverted from legal stockpiles into the illegal trade, with criminal groups exploiting stockpile systems to access harvested rhino horns for trafficking. Ten percent of cases were associated with various crimes such as firearms and drugs.



*One of two dead white rhinos lies on the ground after about nine gunmen armed with automatic rifles poached them and cut off their horns on the Potgieter game farm close to Vaalwater, Limpopo. File picture*

Olivia Swaak-Goldman, executive director of the Wildlife Justice Commission, said poaching had to be addressed.

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“Rhino horn trafficking remains a severe problem that is driving rhinos to extinction. It needs to be addressed as a transnational organised crime with a focus on those driving and profiting the most from this illegal trade.”

She said the call for law enforcement to enforce control was reaching boiling point and this included international strengths.

“Law enforcement on its own will not stop the poaching of rhinos or the trafficking of horns, but the full weight of law enforcement has not yet been implemented.

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“The international community must move towards an intelligence-led approach to bring down the criminal networks profiting from the illegal trade that is driving the rhino to extinction. Wildlife crime is transnational organised crime, and must be recognised, treated and tackled as such.”

This week SA National Parks (SANParks) announced increasing surveillance at the Kruger National Park (KNP) entry gates as part of the festive season anti-crime prevention.

Acting KNP managing executive Dr Danny Govender said: “In addition to the normal ranger and security services patrols as well as the dedicated dog units with tracking hounds being deployed on poacher tracks, these will be enhanced during the festive season.”

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They said authorities were working hard at placing the kingpins who posed a threat to the rhinos behind bars.

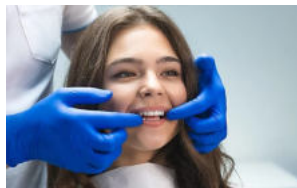
They said the sharing of intelligence resulted in successful arrests of poachers before they kill an animal and that they had seen a reduction in cases.

“Our data on rhino poaching has indicated a downward trend and we want to keep it that way.

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“We have introduced smart camera technology systems at most hot spots. It has helped in the apprehension of suspected poachers and the confiscation of high-calibre hunting rifles and ammunition. Our dedicated rangers are also motivated and encouraged by the recent successful arrests and convictions of poachers. We will not let our guard down as the battle to safeguard our natural heritage is far from over,” said Govender.

The measures have yielded success in the last quarter. From July to September, 10 suspected poachers were apprehended and six firearms were confiscated, they said.

Just last week, Four Paws took over 10 lions from provincial authorities after a compliance notice was issued to relocate the lions from a Gauteng breeding facility.

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