



Lengthy jail terms for rhino poachers following landmark EC judgment

14 Jun 2023 | Lynn Williams



EC conservationists packed the Makhanda High Court on Wednesday for the sentencing of the rhino-poaching gang.

Supplied

Six members of the so-called Chitiyo rhino-poaching gang received lengthy jail sentences in a landmark judgment in the Makhanda High Court on Wednesday.

They were convicted last September on charges of conspiring to poach rhinos and the illegal possession of heavy-calibre firearms and ammunition.

Makhanda High Court judge Gerald Bloem handed down sentences ranging from 16 to 20 years, in front of a courtroom packed with conservationists who turned up in their numbers to show how they feel about wildlife crimes.

Sentencing proceedings were previously postponed due to the brazen escape of some of the accused from the Waainek Correctional Facility in Makhanda last year, with one of the escapees rearrested on an Eastern Cape game farm.

Welcoming the lengthy sentences, Nelson Mandela Bay conservationist, Ayesha Cantor said the Eastern Cape "has a great track record regarding catching the poachers, denying them bail, and then prosecuting them in a relatively short space of time."

Retired state prosecutor, Buks Coetzee, who was given a contract by the National Prosecuting Authority after retirement to continue with the case, also welcomed the sentencing judgment and its importance.

"This was a sentence for conspiracy to poach rhinos and not the actual poaching. It is a first for the Eastern Cape where persons have been convicted for conspiracy only and the sentences, I think, send an appropriate message to other like-minded poachers that in the Eastern Cape, they will be dealt with severely."

Well-known wildlife veterinarian, Dr William Fowlds, said the sentencing represents a "milestone" in the fight against poaching. He said it was a landmark judgment by Justice Bloem because it was the time that stiff penalties were meted out for the intent to poach.

"This sends a strong message out to any would-be criminals who look at the decimation of our biodiversity and our wildlife as a means of making a profit, to think twice before they undertake such illegal activities. I think it will have a major impact on deterring future poaching."

Fowlds said it would also give law enforcement officials a much strong weapon to fight poaching with, adding that the SAPS and the judicial system should be commended for an excellent job.

Judge Bloem sentenced the accused, Francis Chitiyo, 20 years behind bars, Trymore Chauke (17 years), Mischek Chauke, (16 years), Simba Masinge (17 years). Nyamo Moyambo (19 years) and Abraham Moyambo (18 years).