

Alleged rhino poaching kingpin Big Joe granted bail

An alleged rhino poacher who has been in custody for the past six months was granted bail last week.

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Joseph 'Big Joe' Nyalungu. Photo: File image.

Despite what a magistrate referred to as 'overwhelming' evidence against an alleged rhino poacher, he has been released on bail.

The bail application decision of Joseph Nyalungu was handed down by Magistrate Sam Phakua in the Lenyenye Magistrate's Court in Limpopo last Thursday.

During the past 14 years, Nyalungu has been accused of various crimes.

Phakua expressed that it is inconceivable that Nyalungu, also known as Big Joe, is still a free man.

Phakua said that law enforcement agencies, such as the police and prosecuting authority, should be blamed for this.

Nyalungu is a former South African policeman who had been stationed at the Hazyview Police Station. He was arrested when it was alleged that he had kidnapped and murdered a person. The victim's body was later recovered by police divers. The body was discovered with concrete blocks tied to the feet.

Nyalungu is an alleged rhino poaching kingpin.

He was arrested in December 2011 at the N4 toll gate near Middelburg. During the arrest, the police found a large amount of cash and a black bag with bloodstains on it in his car.

It was later proved that the DNA of the blood matched that of a rhino that was poached in the Kruger National Park earlier that year. Nyalungu was released on bail.

Later that year, during a police sting operation in Hazyview, he was caught with four rhino horns in his possession. The police escorted him to his residence where a trunk containing more than R5m in cash was confiscated. Once again he was granted bail.

In the latest incident in Hoedspruit, Nyalungu and a co-accused were arrested after a high-speed chase on May 27.

Nyalungu was followed from Lydenburg by spotter teams and a roadblock was eventually set up near Hoedspruit. When Nyalungu spotted it, he turned around and fled. Being chased by the police and members of the farm watch, he eventually crashed his vehicle and was arrested. He has spent the past six months in custody.

Last week, Phakua criticised the police for opposing Nyalungu's bail despite what he called 'overwhelming' evidence they had against Nyalungu. He should have been charged and prosecuted, Phakua said.

He said Nyalungu had attended every court date over the past decade and he could find no exceptional circumstances to not grant him bail. He was released on R10 000 bail.

The case was postponed to March 22, 2024.