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AN OVERVIEW OF THE PAPERS

by Dr JL Anderson

TWELVE MONTHS BEFORE CITES CoP17 IN 2016. MORE URGENT CALLS FOR LEGAL TRADE! SCAN THE QR CODE OR VISIT <https://vimeo.com/123707224> TO VIEW: 'RHINO IN CRISIS: A BLUEPRINT FOR SURVIVAL. SHORT VERSION.'



Despite well-funded anti-poaching operations and the dedication of conservation staff, the rhino poaching problem has become progressively worse and we continue to lose the war. A new solution to the rhino poaching tsunami is desperately needed.

In the preceding articles, several authors make the telling point that, after 38 years of the CITES ban on trade in rhino products, the situation is worse than ever. Several countries have lost all their rhino and others are now only considered 'range states' because of animals reintroduced from South Africa. These conservationists, all with long and illustrious track records, make a compelling case for South Africa to secure CITES approval to implement a sustainable legal trade in rhino horn. Revenue from horns would no longer go to the poachers but to the state and the rhino owners. Also, there would be no need to kill rhino to supply horns. This would provide sustainable funding for increased protection, bring benefits to poor local communities and reduce the escalating dependence on donor funding.

Opponents of legal trade are mainly well-funded and articulate people and NGOs, equally passionate about wildlife. However, unlike the above authors, the majority of these opponents have not been faced with the difficult decisions needed in managing the interrelationship of habitats, wildlife populations and the needs of

impoverished local people. Their solution is generally total protection and to raise and spend more donor money to fund this.

Dr Ferreira's paper illustrates the increasingly important role being played by NGOs and it indicates that government alone is now not able to curb the poaching. Therefore, is it rational today to expect that 'more of the same' is at last going to be successful in combatting rhino poaching, given the decline in capacity of the SAPS and many conservation agencies? I don't think so.

There is no article from the opposition on a legal trade, but Jane Wiltshire deals with most of their reasons for opposing trade and answers them well. She suggests that range states should be able to legally trade rhino-horn stockpiles, but it is premature to include all range states. Mozambique is a range state and it has less than 20 rhinos and is the source of most of the poachers targeting Kruger. Zambia and Malawi hardly have viable populations.

If South Africa submits a proposal for legal trade to CITES, then the proposal must stress that it is controlled by South Africa and restricted to those range states that still effectively conserve their rhino, these being South Africa, Swaziland, Namibia, Kenya and Zimbabwe. Any sales must be handled by a Central Selling Organisation (CSO) that is transparent and also includes private sector and NGO involvement, with CITES having the option of observer status. The country also

needs to correct the shortcomings as listed by Mike Knight.

Most of the key papers highlight the need for local communities to share in the benefits from sustainable production of rhino and rhino horn. Clearly, in 50 years, our human population will be such that the threats will not just be towards our rhino, but to the very parks themselves. For any chance of survival, both will have to be regarded by local communities as their jealously guarded assets that provide benefits for the people around them.

Dr Mike Knight mentions information that we do not know, in particular just how many rhino are privately owned. There are other important unanswered questions, such as:

- How accurate are the current estimates of our rhino populations? Do we have 20 000 white rhino, or is it 15 000 or even 12 000?
- How accurate is the number of rhino reported poached each year? How many carcasses are missed and orphaned calves lost?
- Is the recent increase in trophy rhino shot each year in accordance with best practice? Or are some landowners realising their assets before they are killed by poachers?
- Why is bail still being granted for foreigners caught poaching rhino? (A Mozambican kingpin caught last year has been granted bail and is now back home.)
- Are there any attempts to extradite known kingpins from Mozambique?



WHAT IS NEEDED FOR THE WAY FORWARD?

- Government must decide very soon whether it is going to apply to CITES for South Africa for approval of a legal trade in rhino horn.
- If the decision is positive, then the corrective measures and questions listed by Knight and the above need to be addressed.
- To gain their support, communities around protected areas with rhino must be brought into the value chain for the sustainable use of rhino and rhino products.
- An inventory is needed of all communal land adjoining protected areas with the potential to be developed for sustainable use of wildlife, especially high-value species like rhino and buffalo.
- Rhino management joint ventures between suitable communities and the public and private sector must be investigated and pilot projects developed.
- There must be a more accurate estimate of the numbers of rhino in the country.

It was most encouraging to hear that when South Africa's Minister of Environmental Affairs, Mrs Edna Molewa, recently paid tribute to game rangers working at the coalface of conservation, she called attention to South Africa hosting the CoP of CITES in 2016, pointing out that this will provide the country with an opportunity to demonstrate not just its conservation successes, but also to promote the sustainable utilisation of its natural resources as an integral part of conservation and economic growth.

At present, with our current rhino populations, a legal sustainable trade in rhino horn that will impact on poaching is the most feasible option in reducing poaching that has not yet been tried. Will government grasp this opportunity while it is still possible?

Or, in 10 years' time, will another Minister look back and say, "Yes, it is very sad. If only we had tried it when we still had the numbers. Now it is too late!"

