

Intense rhino debate under way

An intense debate is under way about whether the ban on rhino horn trade should be lifted as a way of tackling poaching, *The Daily News* says. A number of organisations and individuals say the ban, imposed by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) in 1976, is not working and is at least partly, if not mostly, responsible for the rocketing poaching figures.

They argue that South Africa's proposed moratorium on rhino hunting will have a similar effect.

A national moratorium on the trade in individual rhino horns and any derivatives or products was imposed in February 2009. This, however, does not apply to horn obtained during a trophy hunt, which is still legal. Pro-ban campaigners have argued that elephant poaching increased after Cites partly lifted its ban on ivory sales and rhino are likely to follow the same route. They also feel that there is no guarantee that lifting the ban on rhino horn will reduce demand for the product. Last week the debate was given public impetus with a hearing on the issue by the National Assembly's portfolio committee on environmental affairs.

KwaZulu-Natal conservation authority Ezem-velo KZN Wildlife's written submission to the committee said the effective management and protection of rhino breeding stock remained critical to the species' survival. The submission said people could buy a live animal at an auction for R300 000 and sell its horn for R1.5 million. If the rhino horn trade was legalised, the submission said, the risk to game and wildlife ranchers would diminish and they would keep an increasing number of rhinos. World Wide Fund-SA argued in its written submission that it was important to address what was driving the rhino trade in countries that were the end users. "Without a concerted and unified approach on the demand side, we stand the chance of losing decades of successful investments in rhino conservation," WWF-SA said.

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