

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR THE  
**SAFETY AND SECURITY OF  
RHINOCEROS POPULATIONS**  
IN SOUTH AFRICA



**environmental affairs**

Department:  
Environmental Affairs  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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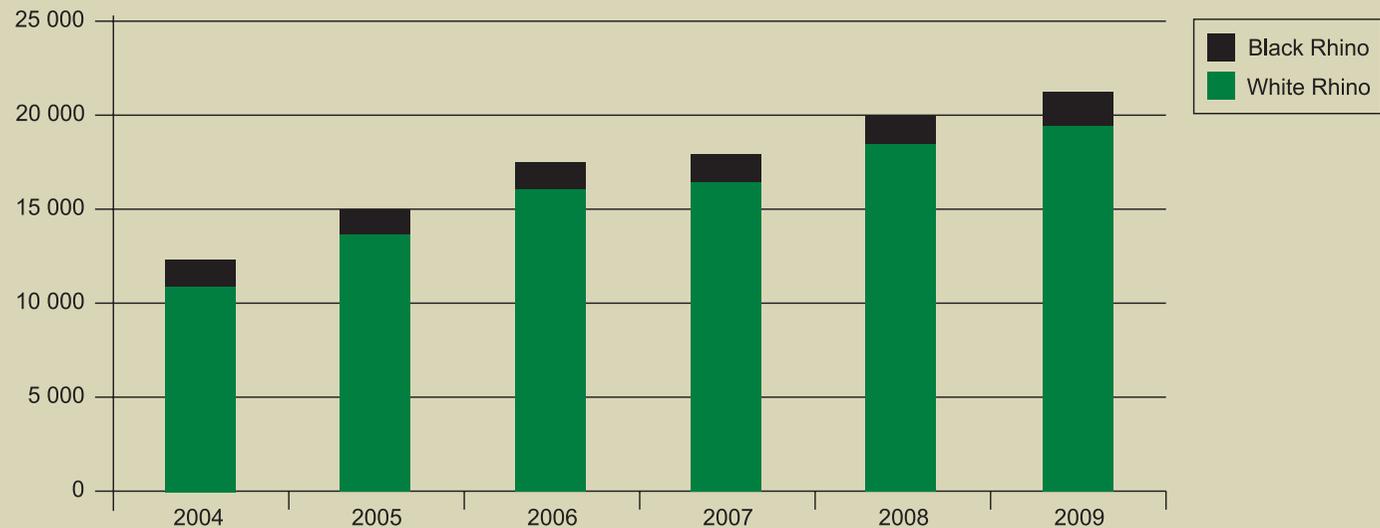
# PART A: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

## I. Introduction

This strategy has been necessitated by a drastic increase in the number of incidents of rhino (rhino) poaching in the country and the continued leakage of certain horn stocks into the international illegal trade. This has raised concern with conservation bodies, private landowners and attracted international attention including media coverage worldwide, and increased the focus on South Africa at the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

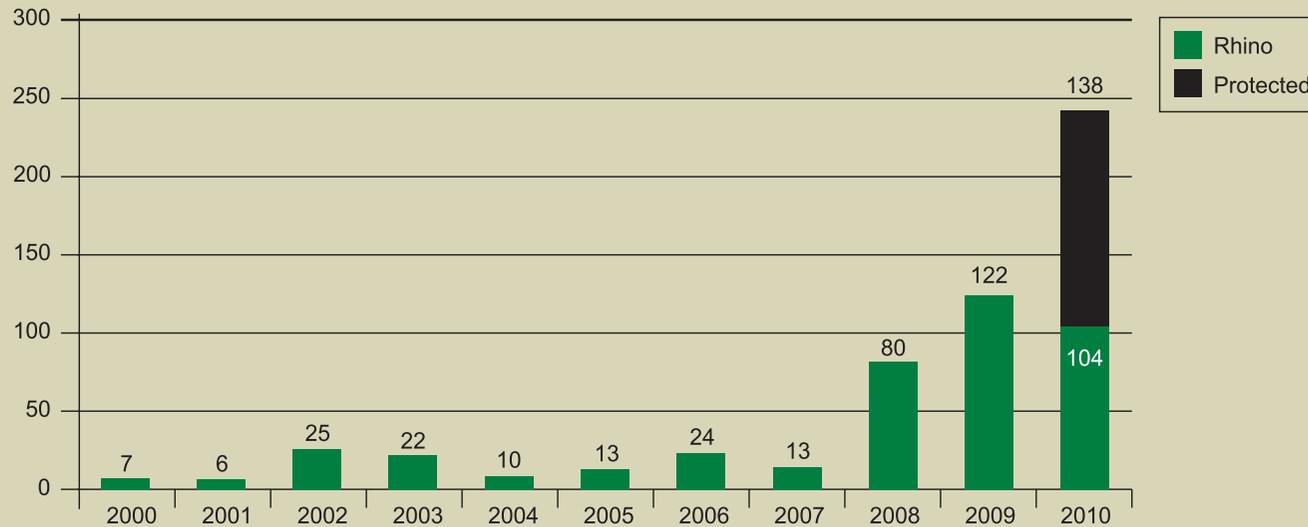
South Africa has a proud track record of successful rhino conservation. The figure below shows how numbers of rhinos in the country have steadily been increasing. At the end of 2007 South Africa conserved 35% of Africa's black rhino in the wild and 93% of the continent's white rhino. To date the rhino populations have grown at a healthy annual 5% growth rate, with the total rhino population for the country estimated to be close to 20,000 by 2008 (Fig. 2) and over 20,000 animals in 2009.

**Figure I:** Rhino numbers in South Africa 2004 – 2009 (Based on data from the IUCN Species Specialist Commission's African Rhino Specialist Group M. Knight in litt. 2009 M. Knight 2009)



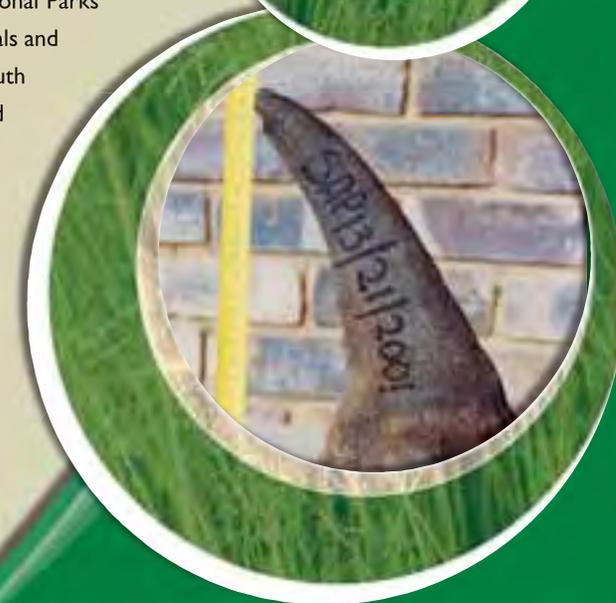
Over the years there have also been various successful breakthroughs in rhino poaching investigations by the many law enforcement agencies. Until relatively recently, thanks to these law enforcement efforts, poaching of rhino had been kept under control and held at relatively low levels. However from 2008 onwards rhino poaching has escalated at an alarming rate as has the leakage of both legal and illegal rhino horns held in the various private and government stockpiles with no indication of decreasing.

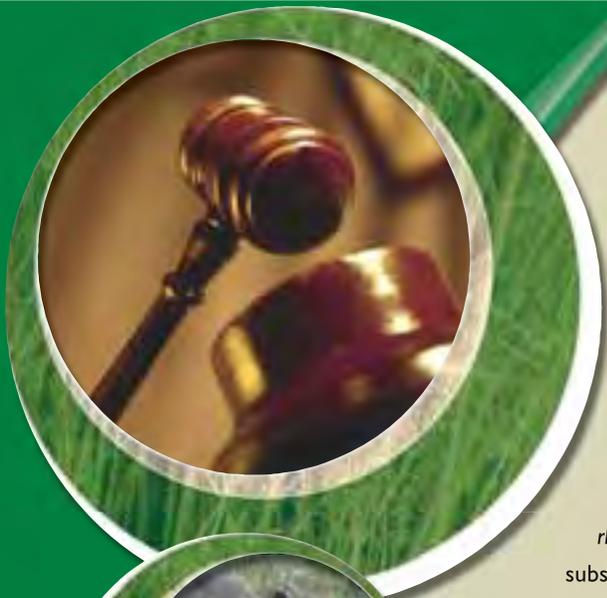
**Figure 2:** Rhino poaching incidents recorded for SA 2000 – 10 June 2010



The brunt of the rhino poaching onslaught over the years has been borne largely by the Kruger National Park (KNP), managed by South African National Parks (SANParks), and the provincial reserves under the management of Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife (EKZNW). Since 2000 the KNP have lost a total of 207 animals and EKZNW a total of 82 animals. The last two years, (January, 2008 through to June, 2010) has shown a dramatic spike in rhino poaching incidents in South Africa. All provinces except Western Cape and Northern Cape, have experienced an increased level of poaching activity. In 2008, 83 animals were poached and in 2009, 122 animals were poached, followed by 105 animals already recorded by 10 June for 2010. As Figure 2 shows if poaching continues at the current rate, by the end of the year December 2010, 242 animals will in all likelihood have been poached.

The modus operandi being utilised both locally and internationally in the illegal killing of rhino and the smuggling of their horns in recent years clearly indicates the increasing involvement of highly organised and well structured crime syndicates that are operating a lucrative international enterprise. In addition to the loss of horns through increased poaching, concerns have also been raised regarding “leakage” of South African horns onto the illegal international markets from stocks in the public and private sector. These syndicates are also involved in the “legal / unethical” hunting of rhino in the country.





When comparing the statistics on rhino population growth with the actual number of animals lost through poaching shown in the figures above, it is clear that current levels of poaching are not preventing South African rhino numbers from increasing. However the concern is that should poaching continue to escalate at the current rates, unabated, one could reach the situation where numbers start declining to a point when more animals are being poached than are born into the population – as has been experienced in other rhino range states in the recent past. A properly structured and concerted effort by government and other relevant role-player's, is therefore urgently needed to address this problem, as it poses a significant threat not just to the rhino population but also to the reputation, eco-tourism industry and public image of South Africa. This threat, if ignored, may consequently have a direct or indirect socio-economic impact on people employed at multiple levels in a number of local industries. It might also lead to international pressures to up-list South Africa's white rhino population from Appendix II to Appendix I at CITES which would have very negative consequences to the country.



This strategy is in line with the national white rhino strategy titled: *A strategy for the conservation and sustainable use of wild populations of southern white rhino Ceratotherium simum simum in South Africa* which was developed at a stakeholders workshop organised by the Rhino Management Group (RMG) and subsequently approved by Members of the Executive Council (MINMEC) meeting on the 29<sup>th</sup> February, 2000 (Publication of National Environmental Policies and Strategies No. 874, and approved for publication on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2003). It is also in line with the National black rhino conservation plan (a revision version of which is in final stages of revision by the RMG (on which the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), SANParks, Provincial Conservation Agencies, and the Private Sector are represented) before being submitted for ratification as a Biodiversity Management Plan under the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEM:BA).

The objective of a security, protection and law enforcement strategy according to the national white rhino strategy should be to: *“Reduce the effects of poaching, and ensure the successful conviction and sentencing of rhino poachers and illegal traders”*. Rhino protection is also one of the six key components of the revised national black rhino conservation plan and its related objective is *“To minimise illegal activity and losses of rhinos, through appropriate management action, improved legislation and sentences, cooperative intelligence, detection, effective investigation and prosecution, law enforcement and community support”*. The rationale behind these objectives is that, *“the major threat to white and black rhino numbers is poaching and illegal trade in rhino horn. These must be minimised to sustain population growth and maintain the economic, tourism, social and community value/benefits of rhino”*.

Until recently there was also an unexpected problem with significant numbers of white rhino being suspiciously legally sport hunted by nationals from non-traditional hunting countries in the East. However, following a number of new legislative measures in South Africa and increased attention from police and wildlife investigators this legal hunting is no longer a major problem. Following the introduction of the new measures there has however been a marked reduction in rhino sport hunting. This unfortunately has coincided with a rather rapid escalation in rhino poaching activity. The question still remains however of how many illegal non-permitted hunts are still taking place within some of the private areas – hence there is a need to stay abreast of numbers and trends in private sector populations.

## 2. Application

This strategy is applicable to all relevant law enforcement and conservation agencies as well as private land owners, non-government bodies and communities involved in the management of rhino populations.

### 3. Purpose

To provide guiding principles to inform decision making processes, strategic planning and operations aimed at reducing the effects of poaching on rhino species and to ensure the successful arrest, conviction and sentencing of poachers, illegal traders and crime syndicates operating locally (at reserve level), nationally, regionally and internationally. The purpose is to also provide better controls and monitoring of rhino horn stockpile management and to promote improved management of the conditions under which rhino may be legally hunted.

### 4. Objectives

The strategy sets out to inform strategic planning and critical intervention strategies aimed at:

- Implementing an immediate action plan aimed at mitigating the current escalation in the poaching of rhino and the illegal trade in rhino horns;
- Securing the shared commitment of government (at national and provincial level), private land owners local communities and international stakeholders, as well as the necessary financial and manpower resources and political will to implement this policy;
- Supporting the establishment of a national coordination structure for information management, law-enforcement response, investigation and prosecution;
- Developing an integrated and coordinated national information management system for all information related to rhino species in order to adequately inform security related decisions;
- Investigating proactive security measures aimed at facilitating regulated and controlled international trade in the species, and any associated by-products.

### 5. What informs this strategy?

In the consultative process of developing this strategy reference is made to;

- International conventions that have been signed and ratified by the Government of South Africa and especially CITES;
- Existing legislation such as the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act No. 10 of 2004; (NEM:BA) and the National Environmental Management: Protected Areas Act No. 57 of 2003; (NEM:PAA); and
- The South African White rhino strategy and revised National Black Rhino Conservation Plan (currently near to being finalised for submission as National Species Plan under NEM:BA and building on previous RMG plans);
- National policy documents.

## PART B: PRINCIPLES

South Africa is internationally recognised as a significant international role-player in rhino conservation. This is due mainly to it currently conserving more rhino than any other country, the crucial role the country fulfills in the global conservation of rhino species and the shared commitment by the government, communities and private land owners in addressing the threat posed by the upsurge in poaching and smuggling of rhino horn. South Africa has also played a major role helping to re-establish rhino populations in other countries which had lost their rhino in the past. Mindful of this status the following principles are proposed, and the stakeholders:





(i) ...acknowledge that the focus of this strategy is on safety and security, as Biodiversity management plans for species are concurrently being revised, as part of a holistic approach to managing, utilizing and securing rhino populations in South Africa;

(ii) ...recognize that due to the unexplained increase in the demand for rhino horn in recent years, there has been a marked escalation in the threat to the security of rhino populations. Concerns have also been raised about significant numbers of horns flowing into the illegal market from other sources in South Africa such as illegal non-permitted hunts or illegal sale of privately owned horns. These threats are driven by sophisticated crime syndicates operating locally, nationally and internationally;

(iii) ...accept that increased resources for financial and human capacity of the initiatives, backed by political will, are paramount to the success of any intervention or subsequent strategies;

(iv) ...accept that positive interaction and relationships with communities, private rhino owners and other stakeholders backed up by effective communications structures, public awareness or education campaigns and incentive schemes facilitate effective and efficient information exchange;

(v) ... support the development of a national organised environmental crime investigation unit under the auspices of the Department of Environment Affairs in conjunction with the South African Police Service (SAPS), National Prosecuting Authority (NPA) and all other relevant stakeholders;

(vi) ...support the development of centrally coordinated national crime investigation and information management mechanisms, supported by law enforcement and conservation agencies and the private sector at all operational levels. This includes the development and maintenance of an integrated crime information database and national permit system by the Department of Environment Affairs;

(vii) ...accept that an adequate number of highly motivated, well trained, resourced and equipped personnel, are the single most important factor ensuring the success of proactive and reactive operations aimed at countering rhino poaching;

(viii) ...accept that research data, including rhino population census statistics and estimates, on public and especially private land (where information for many properties is currently not adequate and efforts to collate numbers are reliant on outside NGO funded surveys), and the movement of rhino around the country, are essential for the development of rhino protection plans. These plans inform threat and risk analyses which prioritize actions and ensure that resources are deployed effectively and also guide decision-makers in formulating or revising strategic conservation and utilization policies;

(ix) ...adhere to accepted and lawful criminal investigation procedures under the auspices of the Environmental Management Inspectorate (EMI) which recognize that the successful apprehension, prosecution and neutralization of poaching syndicates relies on support from the SAPS, NPA, including the Asset Forfeiture Unit, South African Revenue Services (SARS), a sensitized Judiciary with Courts specialized in environmental crime and on the effective recruitment and management of informer networks;

(x) ...recognise the need for Research and Development of new investigation techniques to improve the effectiveness of the safety and security efforts resulting in improved investigation methods and in a better understanding of the crime dynamics;

(xi) ...recognise that monitoring and evaluation systems are essential to ensure that individual animals are monitored where possible, populations are securely maintained, law enforcement actions are effective in maintaining area integrity and that the National Safety and Security Policy to Counter Rhino Poaching in South Africa is being implemented as prescribed by the strategy and standard operating procedures;

(xii) ...accept that for the successful implementation of any strategy an understanding of the end-user demand for rhino horn at the off-shore consumer level is required. Outcomes of this research will inform and may redirect emerging actions;

(xiii) ...adopt a cooperative and supportive relationship with all recognized non governmental stakeholder groups engaged in the protection of rhino and the countering of the illegal trade in associated by-products.

## PART C: PROPOSED INTERVENTION STRATEGIES AND/OR ACTIVITIES

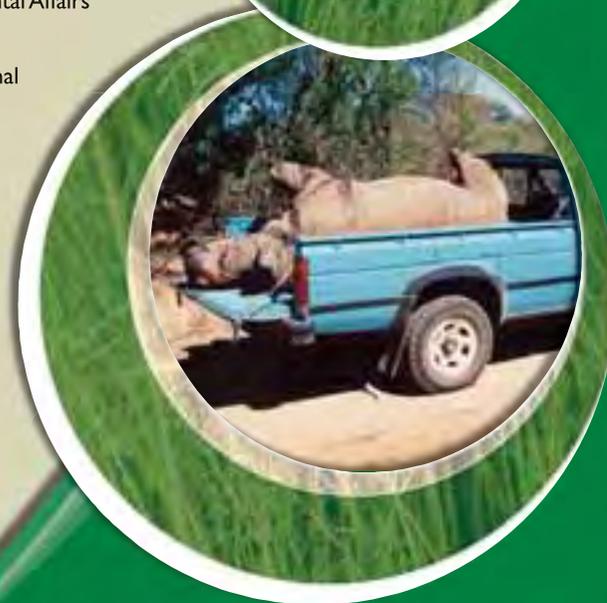
### INTERVENTION

#### *Strategy Outcome 1*

**Implementing an immediate action plan aimed at mitigating the current threat, to the rhino population, posed by the escalation in poaching and the illegal trade in rhino horns and associated by-products;**

#### **Strategies / activities**

- Establishment of an interim National Wildlife Crime Reaction Unit (NWCPU) to respond to the current spate of wildlife crimes and more specifically the upsurge of rhino poaching and smuggling of rhino horn. This unit should eventually evolve into a permanent NWCPU structure within the Department Environmental Affairs (hereafter referred to as “the Department”);
- Obtain support for the establishment, and structure of the NWCPU from Provincial Conservation authorities including the South African National Parks (SANParks), South African Police Services (SAPS), National Prosecuting Authority and Provincial conservation agencies, mindful of the existing agreement prescribed in the document titled “Standard Operating Procedures for Cooperation between the Environmental Management Inspectorate (EMI) and the South African Police Services (SAPS)”. The exact composition of the structure, interim criteria for staff appointment and skills set required are to be finalised after consultation between all stakeholders;
- Seek support for the secondment of appropriate and carefully vetted officials from the above mentioned government departments or institutions to the Department, to form an interim NWCPU to make an immediate impact on the current escalating illegal wildlife trafficking including but not necessarily limited to the upsurge of rhino poaching and rhino horn smuggling activities in South Africa;
- Conduct joint operations, law-enforcement actions and where applicable provide related assistance to provincial structures and private rhino owners;
- Establish a database and information sharing mechanisms for available information in respect of rhino poaching incidents in the country; and





- Conduct an extensive inter-departmental analysis of all available information, culminating in an accurate risk and threat assessment and identification of criminals;
- Convene regular meetings, information sharing discussions and workshops between government and private sector stakeholders;
- Promote cooperation, sharing and a common understanding of best practices on security, crime prevention, combating poaching, illegal or unethical practices and related environmental crime;
  - Recommend interim minimum standards, specifications, operating procedures and protocols for security measures aimed at preventing poaching incidents;
  - Identify and implement common community-based security and policing initiatives; and
  - Provision of an adequate budget and sufficient skilled manpower for this unit to function effectively;
- A need to improve monitoring of rhinos, horn stockpiles and rhino movements nationally especially on private sector;
- Assist in trying to build support for coordinated conservation initiatives and to sensitise the private sector to training opportunities (eg in monitoring, law enforcement etc) and need for increased vigilance and communication in the face of the current escalating poaching threat.

## LONGER TERM STRATEGIES

### *Strategy Outcome 2*

**Securing the shared commitment of government (at national and provincial level), private land owners' local communities and international stakeholders, as well as the necessary financial and manpower resources and political will to implement this policy;**

#### **Strategies / activities**

- Obtain high-level political commitment and mandate, inter-departmental and legislative support through regular briefings to the Minister of Environmental Affairs, relevant Parliamentary Portfolio Committees and other role-players identified by the Minister;
- Identify relevant role-players/stakeholders in all spheres both national and international who could be impacted by or contribute to any activities implied by this policy;
- Ensure stakeholder participation and commitment in the implementation of this strategy by conducting workshops/work sessions between government (national and international) and private stakeholders, on the establishment of long-term structures, cooperation, information sharing, the drafting of protocols, processes and procedures, and the sharing of best practices on security, crime prevention, combating poaching, illegal or unethical practices and related environmental crime issues, inclusive of giving consideration to the establishment of Public Private Partnerships (PPPS);
- Establish a communication structure to liaise between the Department, the Unit, other government departments (national and international) and private stakeholders in order to promote close working relationships and information sharing, by conducting regular meetings, public awareness or conservation education campaigns and community outreach programmes;
- Encourage information sharing and public participation through mechanisms such as an information reporting hot line, incentive schemes and community-based security and policing initiatives;
- Allocate an adequate budget for the implementation of this policy and derived strategies or actions;
- Lobby and secure additional financial resources, through private sector donors and/or grants to augment the government budget and/or to embark on PPP projects;
- Lobby support and acceptance for the implementation of the strategy to ensure optimal rhino security in South Africa and the Sub-region through existing inter-governmental agreements and mechanisms (e.g. Southern African Development Community (SADC));



## Strategy Outcome 3

**Supporting the establishment of a national coordination structure for information management, law-enforcement response, investigation and prosecution;**

### Strategies / activities

- Establishment of a permanent Biodiversity Special Investigation Unit (BSIU) (also referred to as “the Unit”) in the Department of Environmental Affairs to adequately respond to the current upsurge in wildlife crime and smuggling activities in South Africa;
- Develop an implementation plan aimed at building the Unit’s capacity and resources, inclusive of the definition of the required skill set, training standards, specialised equipment requirements;
- Establish Memorandums of Understanding (MOU’s) between the Unit, the Department, all relevant government departments and private stakeholders, inclusive of the development of Public Private Partnerships (PPP’s);
- Drafting and development of protocols, deployment actions, Standard Operating Procedures (SOP’s) and monitoring tools for all activities to be conducted by the Unit, inclusive of joint operations at national, regional and international level, law-enforcement actions, information management and provision of related assistance to provincial structures and private owners;
- Promote cooperation and sharing of best practices on security, crime prevention, combating poaching, illegal or unethical practice, wildlife inspection, law enforcement, forensics skills and related environmental crime issues;
- Recommendation of minimum standards and specifications for enhancing compliance with treaties and laws, security measures and policing initiatives which are applicable to government and private stakeholders and aimed at enhancing protection plans and conservation management of rhino populations;
- Establishment, recruitment and maintenance of informer networks and informer management training;
- Supporting the establishment of specialised environmental courts and the sensitising of the prosecutors in environmental crime related prosecutions;
- Promote the acquisition of adequate human capital at the government and private sector level to support the implementation of this policy and derived strategies or actions.

## Strategy Outcome 4

**Developing an integrated and coordinated national information management system for all information related to rhino species in order to adequately inform security related decisions;**

### Strategies / activities

- Establish and maintain a database for all crime related information in respect of any activities impacting on rhino populations, rhino horns and associated by-products in South Africa;
- Establish secure electronic reporting and information sharing mechanisms for populating the above database, inclusive of the information emanating from informer networks;
- Integrate the above database with applied scientific research data, including rhino population census statistics and estimates for public and private land, surveys, monitoring reports or other data related to rhino population, horns or associated derivatives; Efforts should also be coordinated to dovetail with existing efforts for black rhino and white rhino on state land (under SADC, RMG and IUCN, SSC, AfRSG). There is a definite need to also routinely monitor white rhinos and horn stocks on private and community land;





- Integrate the above database with the national permit system data for all CITES, National and Provincially issued permits relevant to rhino species and any associated by-products;
- Conduct extensive inter-departmental analysis of all available information, culminating in regular risk and threat assessments, trend identification, the identification of modus operandi and criminals;
- Conduct or commission research (as well as cooperating and contributing to international research initiatives) applicable to the protection, conservation or utilisation of rhino species or associated by-products; such as explaining the escalation in poaching, the demand for rhino products, gaining an understanding of the end-user market dynamics, examining alternative approaches which might reduce illegal horn prices and hence reduce illegal demand and ultimately poaching.

### **Strategy Outcome 5**

**Investigating proactive security related measures aimed at possibly facilitating a better understanding for any possible future regulated and controlled international trade in the species, and any associated by-products;**

#### **Strategies / activities**

- Conduct a comparative technical study on current international projects, research being conducted or other initiatives, inclusive of documenting case studies involving successful security related measures, in both the legal and illegal wildlife trade on which to base possible future interventions or recommendations;
- Engage in and support all international initiatives aimed at obtaining a clearer understanding of the consumer demand dynamics involving the use of rhino horn and rhino horn derivatives;
- Engage with and support Regional initiatives through the INTERPOL / Rhino and Elephant Security Group to obtain a clearer understanding of the trends, modus operandi, suspects and initiatives taking place in other Regional rhino range states;
  - Support the optimal demographic and genetic management of rhino populations and allocation of rhino to achieve national demographic (>5% annual population increase) goals as called for in the national black rhino conservation plan and national white rhino strategy. Seeking to breed up numbers rapidly forms another key component of all national rhino plans and strategies. This aspect (biological management to meet demographic and genetic goals) is currently covered nationally for black rhino by the SADC, RMG;
  - Assess and re-evaluate the success of, and determine possible loopholes in, the local mechanisms currently in place for stockpile management, control and movement;
  - Support the finalization of the development and execution of Biodiversity Management Plans for species (currently nearing completion for black rhino by the RMG but which should be modified in the light of any new initiatives to emerge from this strategy) which incorporate a holistic approach to managing, utilising and securing the rhino populations, inclusive of comprehensive crime prevention strategies based on industry best practice and lessons learnt as well as supporting all efforts to reduce human-rhino conflicts;
  - Monitoring: To cooperate with existing initiatives to maintain accurate population estimates and demographic measures of performance for populations (eg through SADC RMG and IUCN SSC AfRSG), and where necessary, and information is currently inadequate (white rhinos on private and community land), seek to obtain and collate such data on a regular basis. Where possible these data should be synthesized at a National meta-population level to aid in future rhino security management;
  - Consider the impact of agreements, legislation and policies not related to NEMA but which may impact on rhino security; including protected area and reserve management conservation issues and security;
    - Support Research & Development of new investigation techniques to improve the effectiveness of the safety and security efforts resulting in improved investigation methods and in better understanding of the crime dynamics, eg. liaison with United States Fish and Wildlife laboratory, the geographic origin of rhino horn project and the field identification of rhino horn/products.



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