The “Plan B” Integrated Rhino Poaching Strategy

Overview

Since 2007, rhino poaching has been occupying the time and resources of conservationists and Government in South Africa and abroad. What started as a low-level poaching concern soon ratcheted into what is now regarded as a complex crisis involving sophisticated and well funded global criminal syndicates. And as each subsequent year has reported ever higher losses at the hands of the poachers, the sense of outrage and urgency has grown with calls for greater action.

Losing any species to poaching would be an ecological tragedy, but losing one that has become a major draw-card for South Africa’s tourism industry will also have significant social and economic consequences. One in every seven South Africans currently depends on a thriving tourist industry for their livelihoods, and much of this success is based on the country being able to market itself as a prized ‘Big 5’ safari destination. If poaching continues at current rates, there is a real possibility that South Africa could, within a decade, be reduced to offering only the ‘Big 4’ in the wild, which certainly diminishes our appeal to international travelers and will result in fewer tourists visiting our shores. It may also result in job losses, particularly in the rural areas where work is needed most.

The proposed solutions however have tended to fall into one of two camps; those that support the legalisation of trade in rhino horn as a means to end the poaching and those that believe non-trade solutions are the best options. This divide has been compounded because many sustainable use proponents have viewed an anti-trade stance as being anti-sustainable use (which is not the case) causing the divide between the lobby groups to grow unnecessarily. As a result, these two competing strategies have polarised decision-makers and the professional conservation community like never before. And with so many concerned citizens of South Africa involved either as rhino owners, financial contributors, tourists or volunteers to the cause, this polarity has also spilled over into the wider community.

Increasingly, this polarity on trade issues is viewed as a stumbling block for constructive and united action, while others fear a conservation fatigue setting in that would also seriously undermine attempts at solving the crisis.

With this in mind, members on both sides of the rhino horn trade lobbies have agreed to forge a new pragmatic partnership that brings together their combined energies with the aim of creating a unified rhino survival strategy that unites all stakeholders behind a common purpose – to ensure the long term survival of rhino in the wild.

This process has come about because ‘The Parties’ have agreed on five key aspects of the debate:

a) Anti-trade does not mean anti-sustainable utilisation.
b) The economic modeling for trade in rhino horn is by no means conclusive, and claims that trade should be the primary tool to significantly reduce poaching to manageable levels is not proven. Studies now show that 70,000 elephant tusks per year are not anywhere enough to satisfy Asian demand for ivory products and therefore question how the horns of just 25,000 rhinos in total can be enough to satisfy Asian demand once Asians develop a taste for rhino products at scale.

c) It is unrealistic to expect any changes to the legislation governing the trade in rhino horn when next CITES members meet in Cape Town in March 2016. The outcome of the London Conference on the Illegal Wildlife Trade, held in February 2014 (which South Africa snubbed), where close on 70 countries agreed to a no-trade policy, is one of the mitigating factors in this regard ([https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/declaration-london-conference-on-the-illegal-wildlife-trade](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/declaration-london-conference-on-the-illegal-wildlife-trade)). Those countries votes alone are enough to veto any changes to CITES legislation that South Africa may propose.

d) If, in the improbable event that South Africa was given the green light to trade its rhino horn at the next CITES meeting to be held in 2016 in Cape Town, this would merely be the first step in a lengthy and onerous process before South Africa can trade its rhino stocks. South Africa and other African range states as the sellers as well as China and Vietnam as the buyers would all have to implement a host of legal, trading, policing and administrative procedures and frameworks in seeking CITES approval. This could take anywhere up to a decade, and may still not be granted. These are timeframes that rhino do not have.

e) The Parties are also in agreement that South Africa withdrawing from CITES is not a well-reasoned option. Disengaging from CITES would not be in the best interests of conservation and South Africa’s general standing in the global community and could result in South Africa being regarded as a rogue state.

Given this newly found consensus, attention was devoted to exploring the nature of the various measures open to concerned stakeholders that would help stem poaching of rhinos and raise the money needed to put these processes in place effectively.

This document serves as a wide-ranging working paper that promotes a multi-faceted approach covering the entire scope of the crisis and the full spectrum of non-trade options, both locally and internationally to assist in dealing with the crisis.

The solutions suggested are in no way comprehensive nor do they seek to undermine any efforts at protecting rhino that are already underway. Nor is there any attempt by the authors to challenge or debate the sustainable use practices that currently exist in South Africa – besides the physical trading of rhino horn.

It is the vision of the Parties to get as many groups and NGO’s involved in rhino conservation behind a single, broad ranging strategy as possible – The “Plan B”.
Once this Working Paper becomes public, suggestions and contributions from all involved will be welcomed.

**KEY POINTS**

While most of the key points listed here are already universally accepted to some degree, and many are also work in progress, they still need to be highlighted for the purposes of having all parties agree to the Working Paper.

These points can be divided into ‘Local’ and ‘International’ with regards to where they are activated.

**LOCAL: SOUTH AFRICA & NEIGHBOURING STATES**

Nearly all these key points will require funding or support of some sort. It is envisaged that this will come from a variety of sources, and in time a detailed budgetary assessment with guidelines and timelines will need to be drawn up.

Government has mooted a ‘Global Rhino Fund’ and has indicated they are drawing up a register of all fund-raisers – this Working Paper will seek to collaborate in this regard.

1) The “Tourism Conservation Fund” and the TOMSA levy

The key component of the pro-trade argument is that selling rhino horn internationally will enable the country to earn money that can be used for conservation and security programmes to ensure the rhino’s survival. The most effective way to raise comparable funds without trading rhino horn is by working in partnership with the wider South African tourism industry - an industry that currently generates around R95-billion a year.

To date, SA’s tourism industry has played a low-key role in the rhino poaching crisis in spite of the fact that one in every seven South Africans depends on the tourism industry to put food on their tables every day.

The way to change that is to ensure that a voluntary contribution (that is modeled on the TOMSA levy) gets added to guest invoices. This provides a practical method for the tourism sector to contribute meaningfully to raising conservation funding while not impacting on the viability of their businesses – so that South Africa does not have to rely on selling rhino horn to raise those funds. The Parties propose that contributions from the tourism industry are paid into a “Tourism Conservation Fund” to become the most significant avenue of funding rhino and other pressing conservation needs.

At present the TOMSA programme generates around R100m per annum. Here guests voluntarily pay 1% of their total bill to just 470 participating hotels, car hire companies and other related tourism service providers. This money goes ultimately to SA Tourism to bolster its international marketing initiatives.

Given the severity of the current poaching crisis, and the fact that almost all tourism providers rely on South Africa’s status as a highly regarded “Big 5”
wildlife destination, it is recommended that a similar 1% contribution is applied to all travel within South Africa.

The money raised becomes significant if a complete buy-in is received from the thousands of tourism establishments and operators that exist in South Africa.

If we assume that only 50% of the entire travel industry signs up to the new “Tourism Conservation Fund”, close to half a billion Rands could still be raised annually for conservation and security programmes in South Africa. This money is sustainable and could continue to be raised each year indefinitely as research has shown that most tourists do not mind donating small amounts for conservation if they know that their money is going to a worthy cause. The funds could be distributed through an impartial and respectable Trust so that the money is spent wisely and fully accounted for.

Further revenue for wildlife/rhino protection programmes can be raised from the following sources.

a) Government and provincial authority budgets: Currently the National Treasury allocates less than 1% of its total funds to parks and conservation. Considering that tourism is such an important industry in the country and job creation is paramount especially in our rural areas, the Parties call for both national and provincial governments to be making greater financial contributions to fighting the poaching crisis and integrating rural communities into the wildlife and tourism industries through processes which ensure that meaningful portions of the turnover of all our parks and reserves accrues directly to neighbouring communities.

b) Funding commitments from NGO’s and corporate sector: both these sectors have played vital roles in assisting government and the private sector in dealing with the crisis. The Mining Charter’s skill development levy could also be a source of revenue as part of this plan is to train and upskill people in rural areas (where many of the mine workers reside). It is hoped the NGOs and the private sector will continue to play such a role going forward.

c) Private philanthropy: another vital source of funding, which could become even greater if sufficient funds are raised to start an endowment type fund. This fund could be managed by one or a group of South Africa’s leading financial institutions, and this function becomes part of their corporate social responsibility commitment.

d) Expansion of credit card initiatives like the My School project which is already in existence which currently raises over R200,000 per month for rhino conservation.

WHERE THE MONEY SHOULD BE SPENT

All funds raised will be used primarily on the following initiatives. This is not intended to be an extensive listing nor is there any suggestion of a ranking of importance; it serves as a starting point for the discussions:

1) Security
The Parties accept that given the severity of the poaching, security measures for private and government stocks must always be a priority and the efforts and effectiveness of institutions such as NATJOINTS can be further bolstered.

Security involves a number of areas and factors:

a) Intensive Protection Zones (IPZ’s): these zones of high security can be of significant benefit if security is not compromised in any way. These zones can be within parks and reserves in South Africa, on private reserves or in neighbouring countries.

b) Equipment: it is commonly accepted that in many instances, anti-poaching teams do not have enough basic equipment such as quality boots, uniforms, tents, night vision goggles, helicopters and radios. Improving equipment quality and quantities improves the ability to combat the poachers, and it also enhances overall morale.

c) Increasing effectiveness of park rangers: along with their equipment, the quality of ranger training can always be improved – included here would be their terms or ‘laws of engagement’ with poachers to ensure higher arrest and prosecution rates.

d) Improve gate and customs controls: there is scope for improvement at all these points – this to include more or better training, sniffer dogs (see point h below) and an increase in personnel if needed.

e) Drones and helicopters: drones can be an extremely effective way of gathering intelligence – the Parties believe the use of this technology should be investigated with the aim of creating a unit that focuses specifically on this aspect. Helicopters are crucial assets in the country’s anti-rhino poaching armoury – not just in KNP.

f) The Middleman: the Parties believe more should be done to target the middleman. Given their high-profile role as both controllers of the actual poachers and exporters of horn, they may well be the syndicate’s ‘weakest link’. In addition, there are not many of them and the Parties believe that with a concerted intelligence effort, it will not be as problematic to root them out as many believe. Without them the whole poaching chain would start to implode. It has been proven that communities will give information if the rewards are sufficiently high enough. Lifestyle audits on suspected individuals must also be included.

g) Whistleblower Fund: following on from (f) above, a portion of the funds collected from the Tourism Conservation Fund should be set aside for a “Whistleblowers Fund” that will pay for information that leads to the arrest of poachers and their middlemen. In general, South Africa’s security measures have relied on a reactive approach, which means the response comes after the rhino have been killed. Establishing a fund that supports a network of informers and a culture of whistleblowing could go some way to being more proactive with regards to tackling the poaching.
h) Sniffer dogs: these should be used more extensively at airports, ports, border posts, spot road checks and all the entrances/exits of parks and reserves.

2) Technology

This is an additional aspect to security that has the potential to win the poaching war. There are a number of innovative systems available to be rolled out that will help solve the poaching crisis and ease the manpower burden that current policies have to rely on. It is recommended that two of these form the basis of efforts:

a) Systems are available that can track all satellite and cell phone calls from in and around our game reserves. With KNP a priority, these will enable security staff to pinpoint poaching activity and may well lead them to middlemen located outside of the parks and in neighbouring countries as well.

b) ‘Threatstalker’ (by Telephonics /Griffon) is another hi-tech system that will help the anti-poaching initiatives. It has been developed in the USA to aid and protect their troops in places like Afghanistan. Comprising a mobile unit equipped with a comprehensive range of technologies fitted onto the back of a small truck, the system is able to track people’s movements 12km away. At this distance, it can reveal an individual’s sex; whether they are carrying weapons, and then it can distinguish whether the weapon is a .458 or an AK47.

If these two systems (with others to come in time) were installed around KNP’s boundaries, they would certainly reduce the workload on security personnel. Smaller numbers of SWAT type teams could then be deployed to react to the information received. In this way, poachers can be monitored more effectively and intercepted before or as they enter the Park.

3) DNA Laboratory

This component is turning out to be a vital tool in increasing success rates when prosecuting poachers. Known as RHoDIS, the laboratory and programme is run by Dr Cindy Harper and is housed at University of Pretoria’s Faculty of Veterinary Science, Onderstepoort.

Currently, the law requires that a DNA sample be collected from every rhino killed or relocated as well as from those that die of natural causes. To date, over 13 000 samples have been collected across Southern Africa and these records are then used in court as evidence against poachers by linking body parts to individual animals and the areas they come from.

The aim is to have every rhino in South Africa listed on the database.

4) The Communities

South Africa’s history has left many political, economic and social scars, none more so than the state of rural communities who have been alienated and excluded through the system and the creation of many national parks and wildlife reserves.
Today, dealing with the consequences remain one of the biggest challenges conservationists face. South Africa’s current tourism and wildlife policies have for the most part not included rural communities living alongside national parks into their business models.

As a result, many within these communities are not concerned at the plight of wildlife and poachers emerge in an attempt to alleviate or improve their poor living conditions. To break this cycle, innovative policies and programmes that integrate communities into the tourism and wildlife industry’s business models must be put in place.

The Parties accept that finding solutions to this particular aspect are of a long term nature and will require serious consideration and efforts from various ministries. However, as a start to the process of redress, a portion of the Tourism Conservation Fund collected will go towards environmental education as well as uplifting communities who live alongside parks and reserves. They will also be remunerated for protecting the wildlife and habitats.

In addition, the wider tourism industry must be encouraged to integrate communities into the tourism industry through a variety of ways; upgrading villages and towns; education; schools trips; shareholdings in tourism businesses; revenue sharing schemes; efforts at liaison and having rhino spokesmen / “friends” within communities are just some examples.

Finally, communities around our parks and reserves should directly earn a percentage of the revenue that is generated by their neighbouring wildlife reserves so that they start to see their neighbouring wildlife as “their” asset.

5) Poisoning

Probably the most contentious of solutions, poisoning rhino horn, or at least making it less usable may well offer the most obvious and quick-fire solution. Consumer research in Vietnam has shown that demand will drop if there was a chance of a consumer becoming extremely sick from ingesting rhino horn. The Parties do however agree that “quick-fix” poisoning solutions like some of those recently tried are not the solution.

The poisoning option needs to be investigated in intelligent and scientific ways by top toxicologists, immunologists and material experts. The parties believe that it could be possible to find (a) a poison like botulism or Staphylococcal enterotoxin B (SEB) which is highly toxic, but it is possible to vaccinate the rhino, and (b) a way to infuse a poison through rhino horn using organic solvents like DMSO. The best case scenario would be to make the horn toxic without risk to the rhino.

Besides the actual poisoning, the mere advertising of the act may well also become an effective deterrent.

6) Dehorning

In general, the Parties would be against this option for a number of principle reasons, mainly that dehorning has already been tried in a number of different areas and in some of these cases, Zimbabwe for example, it has not worked.
Poachers will still kill a dehorned rhino for what little horn is left on the stub of its nose, and because they do not want to waste time re-tracking a rhino that has less value.

7) Trophy hunting

Given that the Parties agree rhino-horn trade is off the table, the sole legal loophole in this regard remains through the trophy hunting permitting system. And it has been a gaping one that has allowed ‘pseudo’ hunters to become a primary supplier of horn into the Asian markets (often via Eastern Europe).

A solution that could achieve universal stakeholder support without compromising “sustainable use” principals is to continue with rhino sport hunting, but to restrict the export of the rhino horn trophy for now until such time as the poaching crisis has been averted. Hunters would have an identical replica made of their specific trophy horn that then becomes part their mount. The actual horn would remain behind in a secure vault in South Africa to be released back to the trophy hunter once the poaching crisis subsides.

8) The Judicial aspects

There are various components to strengthening capacity and application in this regard:

a) The Parties agree that a special investigative wildlife crimes type unit would be best to deal with the rhino poaching. And this unit is trained specifically to deal with rhino crimes at every level from hot pursuit to arrest, investigating and collecting evidence at a crime scene to presenting that evidence in courts. The viability of establishing special wildlife courts should also be investigated.

b) The Parties advocate stiffer bail conditions and mandatory minimum sentences and that these are not discretionary – magistrates and judges should have no or very few options. See the attachment of suggested changes to legislation.

c) The laws and terms of engagement need to be amended – currently, these are heavily weighted in favour of the poachers. These conditions severely restrict the ability of rangers or scouts to apprehend or use their firearms.

d) There needs to be far greater collaboration between South Africa and its neighbours, Mozambique specifically, with sharing of information that could lead to arrests and successful prosecutions.

e) Money needs to be allocated and spent on training law enforcement officers around the country who deal with poaching crimes to improve their arrest and prosecution procedures.

Branding the new campaign
It is believed that “Plan B” for rhinos will need significant stakeholder engagement to ensure buy-in. In addition the public at large will need to be informed on the consensus reached between the parties and the new direction.

For this to be successful, a branding and awareness campaign will be necessary. It is envisaged that such a campaign will embrace various approaches and media forms. Amongst others;

- A multi-media advertising campaign
- Public and private presentations to all stakeholders
- A documentary film for television, theatrical and educational release.

Advertising companies will be canvassed in an attempt to secure pro bono or reduced cost contributions to these campaigns.

INTERNATIONAL

It is envisaged that international initiatives will take place on two levels:

1) Demand Reduction

Demand reduction is a key component of the overall campaign on two fronts.

- There is a need to replicate the processes that caused both black and white rhino populations to dramatically increase their numbers during their “golden years” from 1994 onwards for the next 12 years. All rhino horn consumer countries (China, Taiwan, Korea, Yemen etc) agreed to ban consumption of rhino horn in their countries in 1993 and therefore killed demand. All large scale poaching was stopped in its tracks as there was no longer any demand for rhino products. (See graph attached). This resulted in rhino populations increasing considerably for the first time in over a century from 1994 onwards. The positive gains from those golden rhino years came to an abrupt halt in the mid-2000s when Vietnamese criminal syndicates exploited loopholes in CITES legislation and created fresh new demand for rhino products in Vietnam and now expanding around Asia.

- Demand reduction and awareness campaigns are central and vital components to solving the rhino poaching crisis. Without these initiatives, in the short term almost everything else that takes places on the local front in Africa may well be undermined to the extent that little to no headway can be made.

There are a number of points that need to be reinforced here:

a) The current demand patterns in Eastern nations, Vietnam and China particularly, clearly indicate that these have little to do with Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). This is important as it can no longer be claimed that demand is being driven by age-old traditions or customs that will be hard to break. Instead, we are mostly dealing with very recently acquired flippant
consumer behavior driven by a burgeoning middle-class and fueled by criminal syndicates who understand Asian markets and consumer buying patterns. And these buying patterns are changing all the time, which clearly undermines any modeling based on simplistic demand assumptions. For these reasons, ongoing research and monitoring of demand must take place.

b) While it requires sustained effort, the Parties accept that demand reduction and changing behavior patterns can work: ivory consumption in Japan, rhino horn use in Yemen and Taiwan are good examples as are the changes in seat-belt behavior and the use of corporal punishment in the wider world. Demand reduction campaigns must focus on bringing awareness by highlighting the uselessness of rhino horn as well as the consequences of use to the animals.

c) These campaigns or initiatives work best when trade bans are strictly enforced as the full enforcement of CITES regulations in all consumer countries in 1993 demonstrates.

d) The sending of mixed messages must cease – on the one hand, we ask Vietnam, China and the World for assistance because the poaching has placed rhino under threat of extinction, but on the other we are also currently promoting trade as an option, as well as letting people legally acquire rhino horn through the trophy hunting system.

2) Political lobbying

The rhino poaching crisis is an international crisis. While South Africa remains the focus, the poaching also takes place in or involves a number of other African states and the markets are mostly on other continents. In addition, various World Heritage Sites are affected and the drivers of the crime are syndicates that are also involved in destabilising global security.

Because of this, political lobbying of African and international governments to become involved in whatever way possible will be central to expediting the raft of solutions. This lobbying can be done on a number of fronts:

a) Most importantly, all countries that are CITES members must strictly enforce the current legislation that bans the trade in rhino horn and its consumption. And those countries that are not enforcing the no-trade status must be pressurized to do so. There should be no grey areas in this regard.

b) International diplomacy is not being sufficiently used in this crisis. Nationals of foreign nations are plundering South Africa’s natural resources – our President, Ministers and diplomats must use every forum to demand this stops.

c) In South Africa’s case, our neighbouring states, Mozambique in particular, must be made acutely aware of the role they are playing in the poaching at very senior Government level. Political and economic pressures must be used wherever possible in order to ensure full cooperation and compliance. Both Parties believe there is significant room for greater pressure and lobbying on this front as well as compliance of MOUs that have been agreed upon.
d) Countries where consumption of horn is highest must be made aware of their CITES commitments and obligations with particular emphasis on enforcing the laws regarding trade. China and Vietnam must be encouraged to introduce immediate measure to close all trade and all loopholes.

e) All countries must be made aware of the dangers of voting in favour of any trade resolutions placed before CITES or any other African or international organization.

f) Pressure must be brought to bear on all countries that are not seen to be tackling or targeting criminal syndicates involved in the rhino horn trade.

g) The fact that rhino poaching syndicates are also involved in drugs and child trafficking, the illegal weapons trade, money laundering, and they have clear links to international terrorist groups must be highlighted on a continuous basis.

CONCLUSION

The Parties agree that with more effort and concerted buy-in from all sectors, the rhino poaching crisis can be brought under control. They agree to combine all their energies to ensure, through a wide range of initiatives both locally and abroad, that South Africa does not end up as a “Big 4” safari destination. The consequences of there being no wild rhino in South Africa are too dire to contemplate, especially as one in every seven South Africans depends on the tourism industry for their livelihoods.