

Army 'may be called to stop rhino poaching'

By [Sue Blaine](#)

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The Department of Environmental Affairs on Monday (19 November) met officials from the North West's department of environment, conservation and tourism regarding the recent spike in rhino poaching in the province, national department spokesman Albi Modise said.



North West Premier Thandi Modise said the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) could be called in to help prevent poaching in the province after it emerged that eight rhinos were killed in North West at the weekend, seven on one farm.

Water and Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa is still studying a report from rhino issue manager Mavuso Msimang on how South Africa can better protect its rhinos.

She has delayed any possible representation to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (Cites) on South Africa trading in stockpiled rhino horn until 2016.

Cites meets next year, but the deadline for submissions to Cites expired before Msimang's report was finalised.

Modise said there was a need to clamp down on illegally issued hunting permits, and communities in the proximity of game parks and farms needed to be educated and be actively involved in nature conservation, tourism and anti-poaching strategies.

North West department of environment, conservation and tourism spokeswoman Dumisa Seshadela said the department was collaborating with the police in an investigation into whether any departmental officials were collaborating with poachers by granting them licences to hunt white rhinos.

The possibility that North West officials could be involved was brought back to the fore earlier this month when convicted rhino poaching middleman Chumlong Lemtongthai was sentenced to 40 years in jail after pleading guilty to 52 counts related to rhino poaching.

His case, cut short by his guilty plea, raised questions over North West's handling of hunting licences as he hired Thai prostitutes to pose as legitimate hunters to gather rhino horn trophies.

Modise said the national department welcomed the North West probe because allegations that provincial officials were involved in rhino poaching had gained credence when a farmer claimed that two days after he applied to de-horn the rhinos on his property poachers killed several of them.

Democratic Alliance water and environmental affairs spokesman Gareth Morgan said a request for Public Protector Thuli Madonsela to investigate whether any North West officials should be investigated for issuing fraudulent rhino hunting permits had not been confirmed.

Source: *Business Day* via I-Net Bridge

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