

Rhino poaching figures stabilise - DEA

The Department of Environmental Affairs announced on Thursday, 21 January, that for the first time in 10 years, rhino poaching in South Africa is stabilising.



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By the end of December 2015, the number of poached rhino was 1175, compared to the same period in 2014, where the number of poached rhino stood at 1215.

"Considering that this is despite escalating poaching pressure and in the face of an increased and relentless rise of rhino poaching activity into protected areas - this is very good news and offers great cause for optimism," the minister said at a media briefing in Pretoria.

Minister Molewa was presenting a report on the progress of the Integrated Strategic Management of Rhinoceros which was announced by cabinet in August last year.

The strategy is aimed at combating the threat posed by rhino poaching.

Minister Molewa was joined by the Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs Barbara Thomson, as well as her colleagues from the security cluster, which included State Security Minister David Mahlobo and Justice and Correctional Services Minister Michael Masutha and the Hawks.

"We are also pleased to report that based on a new census of the rhino population conducted by South African National Parks (SANParks); the South African rhino population continues to be stable," she said.

The 2015 survey shows that the Kruger National Park is home to between 8400 to 9300 white rhino.

317 arrests

Minister Molewa said the onslaught against the rhino continued unabated which has necessitated the security cluster to step up its efforts in the fight against rhino poaching.

"During 2015 a total of 317 poachers were arrested for rhino poaching related offences. Of this, 202 were arrested in the Kruger National Park and 115 in the area adjacent to the park," she said.

The arrests marked an increase of 258 from 2014.

A total of 125 firearms were seized inside the park in 2015 and 63 just outside the park - a total of 188 compared to the 148 of the previous year.

"These positive developments are the outcome of stepped up collaboration with the security cluster, as well as working with communities adjacent to the park," Minister Molewa said.

She said by the end of 2015 all rhino poaching crime scenes in the Kruger National Park were attended to in accordance with standard protocols which was a remarkable achievement.

Inter-departmental collaboration

Furthermore, the inter-departmental collaboration between the Department of Environmental Affairs and its partners in the security cluster has provided intensive training and awareness-raising for nearly 400 magistrates and prosecutors in 2015.

Justice and Correctional Services Minister Michael Masutha said South Africa had an 88.8% rhino conviction rate from April 2015 to date.

Minister Masutha said the charges for those convicted included possession of rhino, dealing in rhino, illegal hunting, conspiracy, trespassing as well as the illegal possession of firearms and ammunition.

To date, 1047 border enforcement officials have received training on a programme which focuses on the Illicit International Cross Border Movement of Endangered Species.

The training which is provided by the Green Scorpions will continue until the end of March.

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