

WESSA cautions minister over rhino horn trade

In response to Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs Edna Molewa's support of a proposal that would legalise trade in rhino horns, WESSA has proposed the precautionary principle be practised in situations of scientific uncertainty where actions could cause harm to the environment.



The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is charged with regulating the trade in rare and endangered species. All rhino species are currently included under Appendix I, which prohibits international trade in specimens of these species.

However, the white rhino population in South Africa is currently under CITES Appendix II and is controlled under the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, Act 10 of 2004 (NEMBA) and its subsequent Threatened or Protected Species Regulations (TOPS) as well as the National Norms and Standards for the Marking of Rhinoceros Horn and Hunting of White Rhinoceros for Trophy Hunting Purposes.

Legalising trade is an option

WESSA has recognised that the current ban on the trade in rhino horn is not preventing the poaching of rhinos. Likewise, says WESSA, we must realise that opening up the trade will not be a panacea that will instantly resolve the current crisis. Thus, it considers the legalising of the trade in rhino horn as exactly that: an option and one of many that require thorough investigation and robust information, in order to make the most informed decision.

WESSA supports the current processes that have been set out to explore the viability of trade, but is of the opinion that there are still many questions that remain unanswered or that the variables are too great. Such variables need to be addressed in order to reduce risk to an acceptable level.

The next window of opportunity to submit a proposal for the legalisation of the trade in rhino horn will be in 2016 at the COP 17 in Cape Town.