



**ENDANGERED  
WILDLIFE TRUST**  
Protecting forever, together.

1 February 2018

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### **The Endangered Wildlife Trust responds to the latest report on rhino poaching figures**

The Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) appreciates the recent statement by Minister Edna Molewa on the latest rhino poaching figures, and is pleased to note the reported decline in rhinos illegally killed, from 1,054 in 2016 to 1,028 in 2017. We applaud all those who have worked tirelessly to protect our rhinos. However, we remain concerned about the very high poaching rate and what this means for the future of rhinos in South Africa. The EWT is committed to continuing to work with the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and other stakeholders to save our rhinos from the scourge of poaching.

Noteworthy is the reference in the Minister's report to the collaboration between the various Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster departments. There has been an increase in arrests, from 417 in 2016 to 445 in 2017, inside and adjacent to the Kruger National Park, and we would trust that the Minister will elaborate in time as to whether this is as a result of increased enforcement capacity and intelligence-driven operations, or a sign of increasing incursions into the park. It would also be useful to establish how many of the 220 weapons that were seized were used in other crimes in South Africa, and whether ballistics will be carried out to determine this.

It is disheartening to note the number of officials implicated in rhino-related crimes, but it is promising that corrupt officials are being identified and action is being taken. The arrests of 16 level three to four (courier/local buyers and exporters) criminal syndicates is record-breaking and a critical step in the right direction towards dismantling these highly organised criminals. The EWT applauds the National Prosecuting Authority on the many successful cases that have been prosecuted during 2017, with generally good sentencing outcomes.

Although it is reassuring that rhino horn contraband is being detected at ports of exit, there remains the concern that there may be much more rhino horn contraband that is not detected and is leaving our borders. The evidence suggests that many smugglers are still prepared to take the risk at OR Tambo International Airport, and benchmarking against the measures in place at other international airports is in order.

Given the very nature of wildlife trafficking, it is encouraging to see progress is being made on the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Mozambique, and to see that a new MoU is in place with Zimbabwe. However, the EWT believes that more transnational operations and investigations, particularly

with South East Asian countries, are necessary – only then can we start apprehending level one and two criminal syndicates, which will almost certainly interrupt the illegal trade of rhino horn.

We gratefully acknowledge the Minister's recognition of the success of a project that, through a strategic partnership between the EWT and the DEA, and funded through the International Narcotics and Law Enforcement United States Department as well the Global Environmental Facility, saw 1,273 rangers trained. They are now registered as Grade Five Environmental Management Inspectors. This was a nationwide project, led by the EWT, which covered South African National Parks as well as provincial protected areas, and was made up of 78 training courses.

The joint partnership patrol optimisation project, in the same partnership led by the EWT and funded by the same donors, was equally successful, as reported by the Minister. This was initiated in January 2016, through a collaboration with the all-female Black Mamba anti-poaching unit and subsequently expanded to another five state protected areas across Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Free State and Eastern Cape provinces. Through the patrol optimisation project, we have distributed 70 smart phones to be used for data collection using situational awareness technology developed by the Centre for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). We have also assisted one state protected area with the procurement of a digital radio system that links into the CSIR system.

The EWT is both proud and humbled to have contributed to the many strides made against rhino poaching in the past year. However, there is still much work to be done, and we remain committed to working closely with our partners and other role-players to overcome this major threat to one of Africa's most iconic species.

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