

New plan to prioritise rhino population

The newly launched African Rhino Conservation Range States Action Plan aims to ensure that continental rhino increases over the next five years.



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Speaking during the launch of the plan, chair of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Species Survival Commission's African Rhino Specialist Group (AfRSG), Dr Mike Knight, said it was important to protect the rhino and the range states needed to make sure that funding was available to deliver on rhino conservation as it does not come cheap.

Dr Knight launched the plan at the [17th Conference of the Parties \(COP\) to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora \(CITES\)](#) which is currently underway at the Sandton Convention Centre, in Johannesburg.

Amongst the member of states that attended the launch were Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa, Namibian Environmental and Tourism Minister Pohamba Shifeta, as well as representatives from Botswana, Swaziland and Uganda.

Dr Knight said the plans further aims to have secure, viable, growing and valued rhino populations across the African landscape.

According to Knight the rhino population decreased by 97% between the period of 1960 and the 1990s on the continent.

“When it comes to protection, law enforcement, investigations and intelligence, the objective is to adequately protect rhino and secure their derivatives by the implementation of effective legislation and strengthened coordinated collaborative law enforcement actions (between countries and across different arms of government), improved investigation, increased cooperative intelligence sharing and analysis, effective prosecution and application of best available technology knowledge and skills,” Dr Knight said.

He said the key point from an African perspective, is to strengthen African collaboration and focus on proactive intelligence.

Dr Knight said the entire law enforcement fraternity within governments needed to respond by preventing poachers from entering areas where rhinos live.

“We have to stop them (poachers) before they even get there, the only way we can do that is proactive intelligence,” he said.

He encouraged customs, border controls, social welfare and development to play a role in protecting the rhino.

“We have to share the information with other countries, we need to be using forensic cleverly to make sure that we can link a horn that has been collected in a seizure can be directly linked to a poaching incident, because then we are able to prosecute easier.

“When it comes to biological management, the objective is to cooperatively manage and expand rhino populations across the African landscape to achieve sustained growth rates and to conserve genetic diversity with decision making informed by adequate standardised monitoring,” Dr Knight said.

He said the range states need to conserve the genetic diversity of the rhino and grow the population.

Dr Knight said coordination between the range states can be improved through active participation in international forums which will ensure the implementation of rhino related issues, including range expansion, law enforcement, enhanced livelihoods, training and biological management.

“This is about building links, sharing intelligence and analysis is one of the critical things that we have to deliver on if we want to address organised crime,” he said.

Another area the plan focuses on is incentivising and securing support for rhino conservation by improving the livelihoods and empowering local people, through the promoting of benefits derived from wildlife resources.

Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa said the Rhino Conservation Range States Action Plan does not seek to duplicate the existing national rhino plans but complements plans that are at national levels.

“The continental plan seeks to identify and focus where collectively and cooperatively there maybe opportunities for range states to work together in order to enhance conservation such as enhancing effecting funding for conservation, increasing cooperation sharing and analysing intelligence information amongst many others but also boosting political will and support for rhino conservation across the continent,” Molewa said.

The minister has called on donors to support the implementation of rhino conservation plan.

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