Dear Chairperson, Adv J de Lange

ANTI RHINO POACHING SUBMISSIONS

POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION BY THE PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE ON WATER AND
ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS

INTRODUCTION
The South African Veterinary Council believes that the onslaught against rhinos should be handled as a national issue and that it should receive immediate and sustained attention at the highest possible level. Although government should be the custodian of rhinos, all citizens of South Africa should take joint responsibility for the safety and well-being of our rhino population.

OWNERSHIP OF RHINOS
We would like to once again highlight different classes of ownership of rhino in South Africa which can be broadly classified as “private” and “state-owned and/or para-statal”. The first group has primarily, but not exclusively, a commercial interest in rhinos; and the latter group primarily, but not exclusively, a conservation interest. A commercial interest implies that rhinos were bought and are utilised for example through ecotourism, photographic safari's, hunting, and selling. Private ownership has resulted in a significant boost in rhino numbers in South Africa and has made a major contribution towards rhino conservation. It is thus imperative that any plan adopted
to counteract rhino poaching should be supported by the majority of rhino owners. Government should also again consider the laws pertaining to the keeping of wildlife on game farms/ranches and should consider whether game farming should not perhaps be regulated by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, and not by the Department of Environmental Affairs, since the latter tends to have a purely conservationist view ignoring the fact that game animals were often purchased for considerable amounts of money in anticipation of some return on that substantial financial investment.

SECURITY
It should also be realised by the authorities that immediate action is non-negotiable: while the process of finalising a final rescue plan is deliberated, immediate action should be instigated to protect those rhinos that are presently, day and night, exposed to the perils of rhino poaching. Immediate action should include instigation as a matter of urgency a select “group/unit” of people within the South African Defence Force that should be trained to effectively combat rhino poaching. These people should be hand-picked and be trained in collaboration with security organisations already involved in rhino security in the field. Once trained these people should be deployed to operate in conjunction with existing organisations, privately and on state properties. Regular and ongoing monitoring of these people, in cooperation with private organisations, would be essential to combat potential corruption of individuals. Apart from rendering a noble service, the establishment of such a group within the defence force could eventually result in a significant increase in employment opportunities.

EDUCATION/AWARENESS
Immediate action should also include deliberations by top-ranking government officials (preferably including representatives from organisations like rhino breeders) with counterparts of Asian countries believed to be major "users" of rhino horn to highlight the seriousness of the situation and to discuss possible ways and means to remedy the situation. The discussions should include serious and urgent actions to educate the population about the effects of the illegal trade in rhino horn on free-ranging rhino populations. It is imperative that such educational efforts be conducted in the culture and language of the relevant countries by educators within those countries. These countries should also, as a matter of great urgency, be requested to actively support research projects within their countries to investigate, amongst others, the medicinal value or not of rhino horn.

DISPOSAL OF RHINO HORN
Before any meaningful decision/action can be taken on what to do with rhino horn, it is our belief that rhino horn should be “owned/stored/kept in custody” by one organisation. Hence, our
proposal that rhino horn should be nationalised immediately. Thus all rhino horn, whether already
harvested or not, will belong to the state (or a National Trading Authority) The State then would
become the custodian of rhino horn and the storage of these horns should be meticulously
monitored by a committee independent of the state that would act as a watchdog over the stored
scrupulously identified horns. The system would however probably only be supported by private
rhino owners if the state pays adequate compensation when they physically take over the horn.
Adequate compensation should be such that it would encourage all rhino owners to have all their
rhinos and their horns registered. Compensation should make it financially viable for owners of
rhinos to keep and breed rhinos. A fund to compensate rhino owners should be established and
through tax incentives, international appeal, etc, it may well attract considerable funds relieving
the burden on South African tax payers. Administration of the fund should be carefully monitored
by a committee existing almost exclusively of persons not employed by the state and not involved
in administration of the fund.

Once the State or an agency appointed by the state is the sole owner of rhino horn in South
Africa, it could then embark on serious and in depth discussions with Asian countries to enforce
the point that rhino horn has no commercial value (we will give it away to those that want it) and
that it has no medicinal value (by actively supporting research into rhino horns’ medicinal value).
Alternatively, the SA government or its appointed agency engages in exclusive conditional trade
agreements with Asian governments whereby rhino horns are bought by these governments or by
commissioned traders, and them alone, and that the long term education campaign is
immediately and intensively initiated. Proceeds of sales to Asian governments or commissioned
traders would then form the basis for the compensation by the SA government to game farmers
and conservation agencies.

PROPOSAL TO CITES
A proposal to CITES is to legalise the sale of rhino horn, at least for South African caches of rhino
horn should be prepared as a matter of urgency for the 2013 CITES meeting.

Thanking you,

Yours faithfully,

Dr P. Moerane
President

South African Veterinary Council