



African Rhino Specialist Group

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To whom it may concern

Dallas Safari Club Auction of a Permit to Hunt a Namibian Black Rhino

With all the media attention over the last few years on the increasing threat to the world's rhino population from rampant poaching for their horn, it is often hard for people to understand the rationale for sport hunting of an endangered species. However, while it appears counter-intuitive, the removal of the odd surplus male black rhino can actually enhance overall metapopulation growth rates and further genetic conservation.

The problems caused by 'surplus' male black rhinos have long been recognised by rhino conservationists in Africa. The SADC Rhino Management Group (RMG) status reporting undertaken since 1989 have been invaluable in identifying and quantifying many of these problems, some of which are listed below:

- Based on extensive monitoring of the species in its key range states over an extended period we know that some black rhinos are being killed in fights with aggressive bulls and that valuable breeding females and their calves are sometimes killed. This is more likely to be the case when densities build up relative to carrying capacity in an area, and where breeding populations have a markedly male biased population. (SADC RMG data shows that from 2007-2011 fighting deaths were the single greatest known cause of known black rhino deaths in Namibia (31%) with females and subadults/calves making up 26.7% and 35% of all fighting deaths respectively)
- Old bulls that have had the opportunity to breed are also routinely pushed to peripheral areas by other younger bulls and may be injured or killed in the process. Very old animals with worn teeth pushed into marginal areas are expected to suffer and lose condition.
- Given the current poaching onslaught, it is even more important to try to maximise underlying population growth rates to provide a bigger buffer against the impact of poaching. Black rhino reproductive performance is strongly influenced by the quality of nutrition available for breeding females and the removal of a surplus bull can free up food resources for females and hopefully contribute to improved nutrition and breeding. In addition SADC

RMG data shows that female reproductive performance significantly improves as the ratio of adult males to adult females in a population declines, resulting in faster growing populations – important in buffer the poaching threat.

- Ensuring populations grow rapidly also helps increase the number of founder rhinos available to restock new areas and help increase range and numbers. Rapid population growth also minimises loss of genetic heterozygosity (variability).
- SADC RMG Data also shows that there is a slightly (but statistically significant) 53% male biased sex ratio of black rhino at birth. By chance some populations have a more skewed male birth ratio and are more markedly male biased. The problem with surplus males from markedly male biased populations is that they cannot simply be moved to other populations that have a female bias (as these populations do not want additional males).
- Introducing additional surplus males into established populations can also result in fighting mortalities. As will be discussed later, this is one of the main reasons behind Namibia seeking to hunt some of the older males (25 years+) that have broken out or been pushed out of Etosha National Park.
- If an area has the habitat and security to hold a breeding population of black rhino, this should be the focus, not the establishment of bull only populations.
- On very rare occasions a behaviourally dominant but infertile bull may be a problem. In such rare cases the removal of this one bull would facilitate breeding by other bulls.
- Genetic conservation can also be enhanced by removing a bull that has dominated breeding for many years and where risks of inbreeding are increasing.

These issues have led to what has been widely recognised by rhino conservationists as the “surplus male problem”. Whether or not one personally likes or supports/rejects hunting, the removal of the odd specific surplus male black rhino can under certain circumstances help increase breeding performance and enhance genetic conservation, as well as plough resources back into rhino conservation. Not every male is a suitable hunting candidate, with each case needing to be examined on its merit to ensure conservation objectives are met. As a spin-off, the hunting of the odd surplus male black rhino generates substantial and much needed revenue which can contribute additional funding to support effective conservation management programmes, as well as providing incentives for rhino conservation. Like many southern African rhino range states Namibia supports the sustainable use of wildlife linked to human livelihoods. The country also strives to be as self sufficient as possible in funding its conservation efforts rather than being over-reliant on donor funds.

It was for these reasons that South Africa and Namibia both applied for and got the necessary two-thirds majority approval at the 13th CITES Conference of the Parties for an annual maximum hunting quota of 5 black rhino males/year each. An attempt to overturn these hunting quotas at a subsequent CITES CoP was also soundly

defeated because a significant majority of CITES Parties recognized that the limited hunting was justified on conservation grounds, the quotas were small and clearly sustainable, that black rhino numbers continued to increase in both countries, and that hunting was and could generate much needed revenue to help pay for and incentivize conservation efforts. South Africa and Namibia are the two most important black rhino range states in Africa, collectively conserving 75% of the species with an estimated 2,068 and 1,750 black rhinos in each country respectively, as of 31 December 2012. This can be contrasted with 1980 when these two countries combined only conserved an estimated 6.3% of Africa's black rhinos. Black rhino numbers in these two countries have quadrupled since 1980.

Since 2004 each country has usually hunted less than their maximum quota. In Namibia's case they have in some years not hunted any black rhino, and in other years have only hunted one to three rhinos. To date Namibia has never hunted its full quota of five a year. If money making and not conservation had been driving the hunting, full quotas would have been used every year but this has not been the case. The maximum quotas approved for Namibia are also very small and currently represents only an estimated 0.29% of the national population. This is clearly sustainable. On balance sport hunting of black rhinos has been widely recognised by conservationists as having played a very positive role in the conservation of the species in Namibia. Since the limited quotas for hunting black rhino were approved by CITES in 2004, numbers of black rhinos in Namibia have increased by 51% (and this ignores the fact that they have donated and exported black rhinos to assist with restocking of the species in a number of other range states).

IUCN's World Conservation Congress in Jeju, South Korea in 2012 (in WCC 2012 Recommendation 138) also recognised "*the important role that commercial wildlife enterprises, including trophy hunting has played in generating incentives for conservation and stimulating population increases of rhinos on state, private and communal land in Africa*"; as well as calling on African Range States to "*maintain enabling land use and investment policies together with support for appropriate and well managed sustainable, income generating options that encourage investment in rhinos, sustainable populations and which help fund effective conservation..*"

The black rhinoceros (*Diceros bicornis*) is listed as Threatened - Critically Endangered in IUCN's Red List of Threatened Species and is also listed on Appendix 1 by CITES. Through good biological management and effective protection and conservation, the species has more than doubled from a low of 2,410 in 1995 to the current estimate of 5,080. However the species now faces a rapidly escalating poaching threat making it essential that reproductive performance of populations is maintained and enhanced and additional funds are generated to help fund increased conservation efforts in the field.

In Namibia all black rhino are effectively state-owned and the Ministry of Environment and Tourism (MET) decides which animals, if any, are to be hunted each year. Namibia has an impeccable record in the conservation of its black rhinos. Although it has incurred significant costs, Namibia's MET has developed

custodianship programmes for black rhinos on both private and communal lands. These have seen a recovery in numbers of “desert rhinos” as well as finding more homes for surplus animals from more saturated state populations. Performance of rhinos reintroduced into custodianship populations on private land has also been very good. Most of the Namibian custodianship populations which have significantly contributed to the growth in number of Namibia’s black rhino are on wildlife hunting areas. Communities in the arid North West of the country have also benefited economically from the increased tourism that has accompanied the increase in wildlife (including black rhinos) on their land.

In 1997, Namibia established a Game Products Trust Fund (GPTF) to channel revenue from wildlife use back into conservation. Money from rhino trophy hunting, hunting concessions, ivory sales, tourism and 25% of gate fees at national parks go into this fund. The GPTF has a board that makes grants to a range of conservation projects with a particular emphasis on improving the relationship between wildlife and people. In the case of black rhino hunts all proceeds (after costs) go into a ring-fenced account within the GPTF. These funds can only be used for rhino conservation projects approved by the fund. GPTF Funds can be applied for by MET as well as by community conservancies, custodians and other local NGO’s. Thus, in Namibia’s case all the profits from black rhino hunts (including funds raised from next year’s planned Dallas hunt auction) will go back into rhino conservation.

It seems strange there has been such a furore over the auctioning of one of next year’s hunts at Dallas when to date Namibia’s MET has routinely sold its black rhino hunts on auction. There are good reasons for auctioning hunts off, as experience with live rhino sales has shown that auctions generally raised more revenue than catalogue sales, in addition to being open and transparent. An auction in Dallas might raise even more revenue than if the auction had been held in Namibia; and ultimately the greater the revenue that can be raised the more rhino conservation efforts in Namibia can be funded.

The bulls identified by Namibia’s MET for hunting are older (25 years +) animals that have broken out of Etosha National Park. According to the Namibian Rhino Coordinator (Mr Pierre du Preez), the majority of these problem bulls have been pushed out given increasing densities and social pressures within the park. While attempts are made to translocate younger males and females and integrate them back into the metapopulation; trying to put older males (that have had a chance to breed) back has not been successful. Mr du Preez estimates that in about 90% of occasions, the release of these older males back into existing rhino range have led to fighting related mortalities of either the older bulls being put back or other bulls they encounter. While Namibia currently is experiencing low levels of rhino poaching there is a concern that if these older males are simply left outside Etosha National Park, these problem animals may wander closer to human settlements. This might encourage opportunistic poaching attempts which in turn may give any opportunistic poachers a taste for rhino poaching and contribute to an upsurge in poaching. It is therefore important to minimise opportunistic poaching opportunities. Removing older problem bulls that have been pushed out of Etosha to Mangetti for hunting is a

solution to the problem as well as the generation of significant funds to help boost rhino conservation efforts. With the need for enhanced security protection in the light of increased demand for rhino horn from SE Asia and the increased involvement of transnational organised crime gangs in rhino poaching, the costs of rhino protection and conservation have recently become significantly more expensive.

Animal welfare groups or concerned individuals often suggest that an equivalent amount should be paid for surplus bulls to “save them from hunters”. However there is usually little consideration as to who will pay for the animal, the additional costs of its capture and relocation, and where it would be moved to, who would pay for this land and who would fund the ongoing management and monitoring of surplus rhinos moved there. Such an exercise would not be cheap and rhino conservationists in Africa argue that the money and land it would take to look after “rescued surplus males” could be better spent much more effectively on managing and protecting existing breeding rhino populations.

Thus, in conclusion the proposed hunting of a very small number of problem surplus older male black rhino each year by Namibia each year is justified on conservation grounds and entirely in line with IUCN Recommendation 138 approved at the most recent IUCN World Conservation Congress in Jeju, South Korea. If the auction on a single hunt out of next year’s Namibian quota in Dallas were to raise additional revenue for rhino conservation efforts in Namibia this would also be desirable.

Yours sincerely

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael Knight". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Michael
Chairman