

Media Statement



Tel: +27 12 845 6000

Email:
media@npa.gov.za

Victoria & Griffiths
Mxenge Building
123 Westlake Avenue
Weavind Park
Silverton
Pretoria

www.npa.gov.za

TO: ALL MEDIA

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RE: RHINO POACHERS SENTENCED

On 02 September 2015, Thogo Johannes Zwane, Sipho Hlophe and Zakhele Khumalo were sentenced in the Mtubatuba Regional Court for contravening the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act (NEMBA) Section 57 (1). They were convicted of searching for rhinos with the intention to kill.

The accused were arrested in the Phinda Game Reserve earlier this year on 19 July after the HAWKS received information about a group of suspected rhino poachers who were planning to enter the reserve to shoot rhinos.

The men entered the reserve by cutting through the wire fence. Accused 1 was in possession of a loaded rifle as well as ammunition while accused 4 was in possession of a long handed axe which would probably have been used to forcefully remove the rhino horns. They were arrested when they were approximately 250m into the reserve. The accused pleaded guilty to the charges.

In aggravation of sentence, Adv Waldo Smit led the testimony of Cedric Coetzee, the general manager for rhino protection at Ezemvelo KwaZulu Natal (EKZN). To explain the dire need for rhinos to be protected and preserved, Coetzee told the court that just between 30 August and 3 September three more rhinos were poached. He said that nationally, two rhinos per week were being poached. Adv Smit also emphasised that while no rhinos were killed in this matter, the act defines hunting as either lying in wait for or searching for an endangered species with the intention to kill.

Accused 1 was sentenced to an effective R96 000 fine or 9 years imprisonment and the remaining accused were sentenced to R80 000 or 4 years imprisonment. Whilst the court granted the accused a deferment of fines, they were unable to make the requested down payments and were referred to prison.

The Director of Public Prosecutions in KZN, Adv Moipone Noko commented; "The NPA is pleased that the accused in this matter have been convicted. Whilst we welcome the sentence, I wish that the accused were not given an option of a fine, given the alarming rate at which endangered animals are being poached. We hope the conviction and subsequent sentence will have a deterrent effect on would-be offenders."

Kind Regards,

Natasha Kara
Regional Spokesperson: DPP KZN
Enquiries: nramkisson@npa.gov.za
0716700229