

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

DATE: 03 MARCH 2020

RE: RHINO POACHERS SENTENCED TO 15 YEARS DIRECT IMPRISONMENT

The Mankweng Regional Court sentenced Andries Mathebula and Shadrack Zitha for the unlawful possession of firearm without license, unlawful possession of ammunition and for illegal hunting of protected animals.

Both accused were found guilty on the following counts: Contravening the provisions of Section 31 (1) (a) of the Limpopo Environmental Management Act 7 of 2007 (LEMA); unlawful possession of firearm without license, unlawful possession of ammunition and for illegal hunting of protected animals.

During trial, the court heard that on 03 September 2015, unknown tracks were found on Balule game farm in Hoedspruit and a Rhino was killed with horns removed. Police were summoned to the scene and took samples. Later the accused's vehicle was stopped along the way to Polokwane by the police and rhino horns, firearms, ammunition and an axe were confiscated. The police also found accused clothes which had bloodstains.

In aggravation of sentence, prosecutor Ngoako Mokumo called a witness for Environmental Affairs who aggravated the sentence on behalf of the state. Mokumo argued that direct imprisonment is suitable due to prevalence of the crime and cruelty used when Rhinos are killed.

The court relied on the circumstantial evidence. It found them guilty and sentenced Mathebula to 15 years on each of the environmental crimes and a further 5 years imprisonment on possession of illegal firearm. Zitha was sentenced to 12 years direct imprisonment plus 5 years imprisonment of possession of unlicensed firearm. All accused were declared unfit to possess firearm. The vehicle and the firearm were forfeited to the state.

On 28 February 2020, both accused brought application for leave to appeal and the court dismissed the application, as there were no sufficient reasons to appeal against the decision.

The DPP Limpopo, Advocate Ivy Thenga, welcomes the successful prosecution and the appropriate sentence in this case and is hopeful that it will have a positive impact in addressing crimes against Rhinos and other endangered species in this country.

Mashudu Malabi-Dzhangi

Regional Spokesperson - DPP Limpopo

Contact numbers: 0150450286/ 0748233603

mmalabi@npa.gov.za