

# RHINO NOTES

## Rhino issues at CITES CoP14

*Richard H. Emslie*

Scientific Officer, IUCN SSC African Rhino Specialist Group

### **Document 37.2: Black rhinoceros export quotas for Namibia and South Africa**

Kenya introduced document CoP14 Doc. 37.2 requesting a repeal of Resolution Conf. 13.5, which set an annual export quota of five black rhinos for both Namibia and South Africa. Kenya mentioned that the debate at CoP13 had been controversial. In an associated document CoP14 Inf. 39, Kenya expressed concerns regarding new information that had come to light regarding aspects of management and monitoring in Namibia's largest population, and potential declines in calving in this population due to water supply problems. They also queried a reduction of official Namibian population estimates for its biggest population in 2004 since CoP13 (when the quotas were approved). This also resulted in a drop in the total Namibian estimate for 2004. Kenya also claimed there had been an increase in poaching in South Africa.

In the light of these points, Kenya went on to question the sustainability of the quotas in both countries. Kenya further argued that poaching pressure in other countries and some areas within Kenya had increased, and that this possibly could be due to misleading messages following the granting of black rhino hunting quotas at CoP13. Furthermore, Kenya argued that alternatives had not been fully explored, contending that translocation of animals to other countries would help conservation and foster tourism. Kenya noted some concerns had been raised at the AfRSG meeting in June 2006 about implementing the hunting quotas in South Africa. Kenya also expressed concern that the money from hunts might not be going back to conservation.

In response, Namibia introduced document CoP14 Inf. 43, which responded in some detail to the issues raised. Namibia reminded Parties of the debate at CoP13, which explained that the motivation to hunt a small number of specific male black rhinos was a management tool to enhance demographic performance and long-term genetic conservation. Namibia and South Africa replied to Kenya's allegations and arguments from the floor. It was noted that while debate at CoP13 was controversial, Parties nevertheless overwhelmingly supported adoption of the quotas. It was explained that the maximum quota of five individuals per year per country (actual offtakes being less than this) represented only 0.4% of their populations and was well below the 1% level widely believed to be sustainable. Namibia contended that such quotas were therefore precautionary.

Namibia explained that the population estimate for their biggest population had been reduced as a result of new survey results. The new estimate was in part due to an improvement in the block count method being used (better stratification and removal of one overcounting bias that had operated in the 2002 and 2003 block counts). Namibia also mentioned that any discrepancies in the estimate for the largest park presented at CoP13 and subsequently revised down were within the confidence levels around the estimates. They added that given the small quotas asked for, the same decision would have been made at CoP13, irrespective of whether the lower revised estimate had been used. It was explained that block counting, which has largely replaced waterhole photographic monitoring in Namibia's largest population, provided a useful security audit function. Namibia noted that if the population in its largest population had actually declined significantly through poaching, the block

counts would have detected rhino carcasses, which they didn't.

In its information document, Namibia presented demographic evidence collected during the block count in its biggest population, to indicate that the performance of this population, while not stellar, was reasonable, with calving rates improving. Using indicators, TRAFFIC's information document CoP14 Inf. 41 showed that Namibia and South Africa had good records in effective law enforcement. South Africa disputed Kenya's assertion that poaching had significantly increased, if poaching levels were considered as a percentage of the population. South Africa pointed out that when put into context of the large number of rhinos they conserved (14,900), the 18 rhinos poached last year was only 0.12% of the population and therefore this was not a threat to long-term sustainability — and that the poached rhinos were white, not black.

South Africa questioned how it could be claimed their hunting was not sustainable when their population of black rhinos had increased by 8.3% between 2003 and 2005.

Namibia explained they had not yet hunted any rhinos and also questioned how their quota would not be sustainable, seeing as their numbers were also increasing throughout the country. The TRAFFIC information document CoP Inf. 41 and Namibia also argued that there was no evidence for Kenya's CITES 'signal' hypothesis, which did not logically fit in with the fact that the end user marked did not distinguish between black rhino and white rhino horn and the observed doubling in South Africa's white rhino numbers since their annotated downlisting (including advertising continued export of hunting trophies). The danger of confusing correlation with cause was mentioned, and the point was made that declines in some areas highlighted by Kenya were most probably the result of other factors such as political instability, lack of political will, and/or low conservation budgets. Namibia argued that Kenya's new information was in fact old information, and that steps had been taken to address concerns raised in the documents Kenya referred to.

Since the AfRSG meeting, the concerns raised about the South African black rhino hunting permit allocation and approval system have also been dealt with internally through the SADC Rhino Management Group. The issue was debated at length at its November 2006 meeting, and a follow-up working

group chaired by the AfRSG Scientific Officer drew up a revised permit approval and application system. This has been written up and before being forwarded by South Africa's Department of the Environment and Tourism (DEAT) for official ratification has been submitted for comment to RMG (Rhino Monitoring Group) representatives from South African National Parks, DEAT, and the nine provincial conservation agencies. At the time of writing, comment has been received from all but two of these agencies, and it has been favourable.

The proposed revised system is now fully in line with recommended best practices suggested by AfRSG, and it will no longer allow the hunting of 'vagrant' rhinos.

CITES CoP14 Doc.54 also showed that just over half of the black rhino hunting money to date has gone back to formal conservation agencies, with some additional funding going to a community reserve.

In view of 1) the time granted to Kenya, Namibia and South Africa to state their cases in Committee I; 2) the significant amount of associated documentation relevant to the issue, namely Documents 37.2 and 54, and Information Documents 39, 41 and 43 (all of which are downloadable from the CITES website); and 3) in the interest of moving business along, the Chair of Committee I allowed only four interventions from the floor.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda supported the proposal, agreeing that cross-border translocation of surplus individuals could further conservation and promote tourism. However, in their interventions, neither Party explained how only males of a non-indigenous subspecies (which may be very old and not live long or survive translocation) would breed or enhance conservation or boost tourism.

Botswana and Japan, however, considered that Kenya's allegations had been adequately addressed by Namibia and South Africa and rejected the Kenyan proposal. Botswana noted that black rhinos had been reestablished in their country with rhinos provided by South Africa and Namibia (in the latter case, via a swap deal with South Africa to ensure the correct subspecies was translocated). They suggested that countries wishing to reestablish rhinos should contact major range States who may have surplus rhinos for restocking.

Kenya expressed concerns that due to insufficient time remaining in the session, the debate had been truncated. Following a vote requested by Kenya, the

proposal was rejected, with 81.25% voting against (votes in favour 15, against 65, abstentions 11).

## **Document 54: Interpretation and implementation of the convention—rhinoceroses**

The Secretariat introduced document CoP14 Doc. 54 and referred the delegates to the proposed draft decisions and draft amendments to Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP13).

The Secretariat noted that the information on the national and continental conservation status of African and Asian rhinos species, legal and illegal trade in rhino specimens, incidents of illegal killing of rhinos, and conservation and management strategies and actions, compiled by the IUCN/SSC African and Asian Rhino Specialist Groups (summarized in Annex 1 of CITES CoP14 Doc.54) was in compliance with Decision 13.25.

The Secretariat noted that the joint AfRSG/AsRSG/TRAFFIC report entitled 'African and Asian Rhinoceroses—Status, Conservation and Trade' included the information that the Standing Committee requested from TRAFFIC on rhino horn stockpile volumes, seizures and poaching. TRAFFIC also released an informative associated information document at CoP14 (Inf. 41) entitled 'Rhino-Related Crimes in Africa: An Overview of Poaching, Seizure and Stockpile Data for the Period 2000–2005'. Both documents can be downloaded from the CITES website. The Secretariat thanked IUCN and TRAFFIC for having shared this information, as well as all those who contributed to it, particularly range States of rhinos, and to the donors who supported the work. It was mentioned that the Rhino Specialist Groups and TRAFFIC, moreover, had had much difficulty in raising the funds necessary to hold meetings and to do the work necessary.

The Secretariat remarked that the summary report by IUCN and TRAFFIC in Annex 1 of Doc. 54 was factually rich, up-to-date and comprehensive, and that it should allow range States of African and Asian rhinos and the Conference of the Parties to make well-informed decisions on managing and conserving rhinos, to assess general compliance with Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP13), and to agree on future reporting. It was noted that the report contained all the information requested in Decision 13.25 and a useful section,

'CITES rhino matters: a report back', that follows up on the impact of a number of recent decisions by the Conference of the Parties concerning rhinos.

Germany, on behalf of the European Community and its Member States, fully endorsed the draft decisions and draft amendments to the Resolution, requesting that the financial implications of adopting these be reflected in the costed programme of work for the triennium 2009–2011, in order to provide a sustainable basis for funding future work on this issue. They wished the issue of rhino conservation to remain on the Standing Committee's programme of work until CoP15 and requested an amendment requiring the Secretariat to report on progress towards implementing all three proposed Decisions at the 57th and 58th meetings of the Standing Committee as well as at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties.

Qatar, supported by China, Japan, Namibia, Nepal, South Africa, Swaziland, the United States of America and TRAFFIC, endorsed the draft decisions and draft amendments to the Resolution. However, Qatar was concerned that it would be difficult for the Secretariat to secure the funds needed to progress. The United States suggested that budgetary implications be referred to the Budget Working Group, while South Africa asked that these costs be reflected in the costed programme of work.

TRAFFIC commended the document, referred the delegates to their associated document CoP14 Inf. 41, and drew attention to progress in implementing Resolution Conf. 9.14 (Rev. CoP13). Kenya was in broad support of the draft decisions and draft amendments to Resolution 9.14 (Rev. CoP13) but considered that the Resolution needed further strengthening, including inserting text to require that Parties destroy their stocks of rhino horn, unless they were being held for educational purposes. They further considered that range State consultation over the findings presented in Annex 1 to document CoP14 Doc. 54 had been insufficient and suggested amendments to the Resolution to reflect this. However, this was due to unexpectedly tight deadlines for the first report, and efforts will be made to allow sufficient time for consultation with range States in future.

Kenya proposed extensive amendments to the draft decisions. In response, the Chair suggested a working group might be necessary, but Namibia responded that they did not agree with Kenya's proposed changes (either procedurally or in terms of

their content) and did not support the establishment of a working group. Namibia was supported from the floor by Botswana, Japan, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The draft decisions and amendments in document CoP14 Doc. 54, with the amendment proposed by Germany, were then agreed to by consensus.

The issue of funding for the Specialist Groups and TRAFFIC was raised in the Budget Working Group, but the large discrepancy between a fully costed CITES work programme and the amount of money in the CITES trust fund was a problem. It is therefore likely that the Specialist Groups and TRAFFIC will once again have to try to raise the necessary funds.

## **Possible amalgamation of CITES Appendix I species resolutions**

At the request of a previous CoP, the Secretariat had produced a draft document that sought to synthesize and amalgamate the various CITES Appendix I species resolutions and hunting quotas into single documents. This would have involved scrapping Res. 9.14 (rev.), which had just been amended in Committee I. Debate from the floor overwhelmingly rejected amalgamating the species resolutions and hunting quotas, and it was decided by consensus not to proceed with the suggested combined resolution.