

DEA implements CITES CoP17 decisions

LA TE last year, South Africa hosted 17th Conference of Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) at the Sandton Convention Centre, where CITES Parties and observers engaged in robust discussions and came up with resolutions to take forward the work underway around the trade in flora and fauna.

The Department of Environmental Affairs is already implementing decisions taken at the conference. These include:

Provisions to strengthen actions to combat illicit wildlife trafficking, improve protection of entire groups of species, empowering youth and closer engagement with rural communities;

Provisions to manage the international trade in hunting trophies and the trade in cycads;

The CITES listing of wild ginger and Temminck's pangolin;

The transfer of the Cape Mountain Zebra from Appendix I to Appendix II by CITES, which recognises a remarkable conservation success story – where a species has recovered from just less than 100 individual animals in the 1990s to over 5 000 in 2016; and

The decision not to list South Africa's elephant population in

BIODIVERSITY ECONOMY

IN 2016, the DEA and the Department of Tourism co-hosted a Biodiversity Economy Operation Phakisa Delivery Lab to accelerate the economic growth and job creation opportunities in the biotechnology and biodiversity conservation sectors, in particular through the ecotourism and wildlife sectors.

The Biodiversity Economy implementation plans target the creation of 100 000 jobs, and support for 4 000 new SMMEs by 2030.

For this financial year, the department is:

Prioritising the identification of about 800 000 hectares of land for wildlife economy activities;

Establishing 11 National Biodiversity Economy Nodes and priority projects therein;

Identifying the top 25 plant species for cultivation to provide employment and stimulate economic activities across the bio-prospecting value chain;

Investing in conservation management infrastructure

with a focus on base infrastructure such as fencing and water reticulation, through the Department's Environmental Protection Infrastructure Programme;

Establishing eight pilot wildlife economy projects for this financial year; and

Developing support interventions for Biodiversity Economy projects implemented by national and provincial entities, such as game donations, the provision of veterinary services and capacity building.

Appendix I, which would have introduced a ban on the international commercial trade in wild elephant.

This is a victory for scientific, evidence-based decision-making.

The Parties and observers discussed the document on the rhinoceros, which reported on a wide range of activities that have been undertaken by Parties, the Secretariat and the Standing Committee's Working Group on Rhinoceroses in the period from CoP16 to CoP17, in support of the

implementation of the Decisions adopted by CoP16 and the recommendations adopted by the CITES Standing Committee its meetings in 2014 and in 2016.

All Parties will review their implementation of the Resolution on the Conservation of and trade in African and Asian rhinoceroses, and the strategies and proposed actions developed by the CITES Rhinoceros Enforcement Task Force.

The aim of the review is to enhance implementation of the

Resolution and the strategies and proposed actions, and to increase the effectiveness of the law-enforcement responses to rhinoceros poaching and rhinoceros horn trafficking.

All rhinoceros range states should continuously review poaching and trafficking trends, to ensure that the measures they implement to prevent and combat rhinoceros poaching and rhinoceros horn trafficking remain effective and are quickly adapted to respond to any newly identified

trends.

The African lion symbolises strength, courage and leadership for many people and is often referred to as the King of the Beasts. It is therefore not surprising that any discussions relating to the African lion will solicit much passionate discussion and the discussions at the 17th CoP to CITES relating to the proposed transfer of all African lion population from Appendix II to Appendix I were no exception.

At the 17th CoP to CITES, the proposed listing of lion in Appendix I was discussed in detail and although the African lion range states agreed on a number of decisions that included conservation actions; studies on legal and illegal trade in lions, including bone trade; and a comparative study of lion population trends and conservation and management practices such as hunting; the range states could not reach agreement on the proposed transfer to Appendix I.

After protracted discussions, an annotation to the Appendix II listing was proposed. This meant that the African lion would remain in Appendix II, but with certain 'conditions' attached to the listing, which excluded certain specimens from the Appendix II listing.

Black Mambas strike rhino poachers

Minister of Environmental Affairs, Edna Molewa with Felicia Mokgakane, 28 and Colet Ngobeni, 31, who are part of the Black Mambas team.



PHOTO: ERICA MATHYE

TO protect the rhino from poaching, the Department of Environmental Affairs initiated the National Environmental Monitoring Programme (NEMP) in 2012. The first group of 24 environmental monitors were deployed at the privately owned reserve Sabi Sands, which borders the Kruger National Park.

The programme has since grown from a security driven approach to environmental management, in response to many challenges experienced on protected areas throughout the country.

Since inception over 2 000 environmental monitors have participated in the programme focusing on patrols, environmental monitoring and education.

One of the most well-known environmental monitoring groups is the Black Mambas Anti-Poaching Unit, an all-female team of environmental monitors based at Balule Private Nature Reserve.

It has attracted attention from all over the world with over 2 billion hits since winning the United Nations Environment Programme: Champions of the Earth.

Individual Environmental Monitors have also won accolades within conservation and the current Ranger of the Year in South Africa, Anton Mzimba is part of the programme.

The Department provides monthly wages/stipends to all environmental monitors and the host institutions covers all operational costs, amongst others training, accommodation, and personal protective equipment.

Thirty-two host institutions, of which seven are

public entities and 25 private reserves/institutions, are currently benefiting from the programme.

Between 2013 and 2016, the programme received several national and international awards in recognition of the work done by environmental monitors in their different fields of operation. These awards included the following: Best EPWP Kamoso National Programme, Best Rhino Conservation, Best Biodiversity Special Programme and United Nations Environment Programme: Champions of the Earth.

In 2015, South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) flighted a 16 episode series, named Code Green, which brought in all environmental monitors from KwaZulu-Natal known as Rhino Ambassadors.

The series was such a success and as a result SABC has now approved a 26-episode series as a follow up, which will be flighted between July and November 2017.

During the 2016 Conference of Parties of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES COP17), hosted by South Africa, the programme attracted interest from international audiences particularly from the SADC Region.

The programme continues to attract interest from both the public and private sector of South Africa, based on its uniqueness within the Expanded Public Works Programme and its impact within the biodiversity and conservation management space.

The Department of Environmental Affairs is proud to implement such an impactful programme.

GREEN SCORPIONS PUT A STING IN ENVIRO CRIMES

THE Green Scorpions, founded in 2005, are Environmental Management Inspectors (EMI) who have substantially changed the face of environmental protection in South Africa.

In 2016, the Green Scorpions trained 905 border officials on initiatives focused on the Illicit International Cross Border Movement of Endangered Species.

This national EMI network seeks to breakthrough the traditional separation between the protection of different aspects of the environment and includes park rangers and conservation officers, air quality officers, marine and coastal enforcement officers, pollution and waste enforcement officials and officials monitoring urban developments.

The legal mandate of the Green Scorpions is to undertake compliance and enforcement in terms of the full ambit of national sectoral environmental Acts.

In order to undertake their duties effectively, Green Scorpions can carry out routine inspections, investigation, enforcement, which includes search and seizure of premises, containers, vessels, vehicles, aircraft and pack animals and the issuing of compliance notices.

The Green Scorpions also take a proactive approach to compliance and enforcement by focussing their attentions on strategic industry sectors.

These include the ferroalloy, steel and iron industry; refineries; cement; paper and pulp; health care risk waste; hazardous waste

and power generation sectors.

In addition, certain 'blitzes' are also planned and executed in sectors in which non-compliances are rife, for example, health-care risk waste and sand-mining.

With this type of approach, the Green Scorpions are able to maximise their impact with their limited human and financial resources, by targeting the key risks to the environment.

Its capacity-building programme was bolstered by the involvement of international environmental agencies, such as the United States Environmental Protection Agency as well as the Environment Agency of England and Wales.

On the international front, the Green Scorpions have actively engaged with the International Consortium on Combating Wildlife Crime partners, which include Interpol, the World Customs Organisation, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime and the CITES Secretariat.

Through these engagements and participation in international operations, the important work of the Inspectorate in fighting environmental crime has been highlighted and strengthened.

The Inspectorate (together with other enforcement agencies in the country) plays an important role in giving effect to and implementing the commitments made in terms of the many enforcement-related international declarations, strategies and memoranda of understanding focussed on environmental crimes.

