

**Ref:02/1/5/2**

**MINISTER**

**QUESTION NO. 744 FOR WRITTEN REPLY: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

A draft reply to **Mr T Z Hadebe (DA)** to the above-mentioned question is enclosed for your consideration.

**MS NOSIPHO NGCABA**

**DIRECTOR-GENERAL**

**DATE:**

**DRAFT REPLY APPROVED/AMENDED**

**DR B E E MOLEWA, MP**

**MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**DATE:**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**(For written reply)**

**QUESTION NO. 744 {NW803E}**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO.11 of 2017**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION: 24 March 2017**

**Mr T Z Hadebe (DA) to ask the Minister of Environmental Affairs:**

With reference to a press release by the SA National Parks in 2010 (details furnished) and her press release on 27 February 2017 (details furnished), how does she explain the loss of at least 2 377 white rhinos from the Kruger National Park since 1 January 2010? NW803E

**744. THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS REPLIES:**

The honorable member is aware that numerous interventions have been implemented since 2008/9 by government and other stakeholders to address the scourge of poaching and illegal trade in rhino horn. The poaching (illegal killing) remains a priority crime and the integrated strategic management approach approved by Cabinet in 2014 and implemented by the relevant government departments, is resulting in the reduction of losses experienced in Kruger National Park. This is despite a continued increase in the number of illegal incursions into the Kruger National Park. The successes achieved are because of, inter alia, our dedicated law-enforcement authorities, dedicated prosecutors, customs and excise officials and the Department of Environmental Affairs’ Green Scorpions.

South Africans are urged to report any wildlife crime so that we, as an integrated law enforcement effort team, can continue to successfully act against organised criminal enterprises fostering rhino poaching.

The Kruger National Park was specifically targeted by poachers from the onset of this onslaught and the following was implemented in the Park to address the illegal killing of rhino:

Around 2010, South African National Parks (SANParks) reacted to the escalation in poaching by training and equipping existing rangers, crime investigators and the air wing to cope with a totally new set of circumstances associated with the increase in poaching. All of a sudden the one thousand kilometres of boundary of the Kruger National Park (KNP) had to be protected from intrusions by poachers sponsored by both international and local crime networks. This endeavour was challenged by the sheer magnitude of the poaching (till 2014 mostly from Mozambique) onslaught in subsequent years. The number of poaching incidents later soared to about seven a day with up to a dozen poacher groups active inside the Park on any day. To contain this over two million hectares was challenging in all respects.

It was soon realized that the new dimension of organized crime impacting on wildlife in the (KNP) was a matter to be dealt with by all of the Security Cluster participants as well the Mozambique law enforcement agencies. None of the aforementioned were really prepared for this challenge and it took time to mobilize them given all their other priorities.

In 2012, SANParks (with the direct support of the Minister), increased the ranger numbers with 50%, resulting in one hundred and fifty extra rangers. This new capacity had to be developed into a mission ready capability of staff, equipment, training, sustainment and applicable doctrine.

Since 2013, a para military approach was adopted and a formal structure was established to deal with the threat.

In 2014, an integrated national strategy was implemented to counter the escalating poaching onslaught. Apart from law enforcement, the plan also covers the management of the asset (rhino) in the form of translocations, maximizing breeding and rhino orphanages. Another part of the plan addresses community needs and creating long term sustainable economic alternatives. The strategy furthermore addresses the quest for game changers such as the technology based force multipliers and the collapse of crime networks.

By the end of 2015 the newly established anti – poaching unit (APU) was mission ready. The air wing, canine unit and special rangers were expanded and appropriate technologies acquired. The air and ground mobility was enhanced and the capacity for night operations improved. This capability was deployed on a well thought out zoning approach to address the right priority areas at any one time. The investment started paying off and during that year rhino poaching figures could be stabilized for the first time since the start of the scourge.

During 2016 the figures decreased by twenty percent and the current drive is to continue this trend over the next three years.

SANParks also took the initiative to co-opt the various parties in Mozambique and other parks and reserves to the west of KNP in a successful alliance (Greater Kruger Environmental Asset Protection Foundation) concept that is now ensuring more preventative actions by these neighbours outside the KNP.

It is noteworthy that whilst SANParks accepts its roles and responsibilities to combat wildlife crime inside the protected area in terms of its legal mandate, the organized crime elements should be combatted at its origin outside the Park.

While the enforcement focus was needed to bring the situation under control, SANParks also recognise the need to continue to invest in the other pillars of the Integrated Strategic Management approach adopted by Cabinet in 2014.

As opposed to the figure that the honorable member quotes, in terms of our information the Kruger National Park lost 3 744 rhino between 2010 and 2016 due to poaching. This is despite our very intense fight against rhino poaching and in the face of an ever increasing number of incursions into the Park. The losses due to poaching have been reported regularly to the public through detailed quarterly progress reports.

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