

S.Africa opposes total ban on rhino horn exports

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A black dehorned rhinoceros walks on August 3, 2012 at the Bona Bona Game Reserve, 200 kms southeast of Johannesburg. South Africa announced its opposition to a total ban on rhino trophy exports, saying it has beefed up hunt rules amid a poaching crisis that has killed 96 animals this year.

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The government backed a recommendation by the UN wildlife trade regulator CITES secretariat that a proposal halting trade in rhino trophies and products be rejected at an upcoming meeting.

"We also welcome CITES' acknowledgement of the recent significant steps taken to improve the management of rhino hunting," said environment minister Edna Molewa in a statement.

Kenya has proposed that a zero export quota be put in place in Swaziland and South Africa, which has the world's biggest white rhino population and allows legal hunts.

It is one of dozens of proposals on the global [wildlife trade](#) that will be voted on at next month's meeting of the 176-member country body in Bangkok.

The CITES secretariat said that South Africa had taken "significant steps to improve its management of rhino hunting".

Rather than trophy hunting having a negative impact on white rhino population, it said "available information suggests the contrary".

South Africa overhauled its rhino hunt rules amid a scandal over abuse of permit system that saw prostitutes organised to pose as marksmen to smuggle horns to the international market.

The stricter rules had "resulted in a significant reduction in the number of hunting applications received", the environment ministry said.

The proposed ban, of several years, would halt a potentially sustainable and beneficial management model, said the CITES secretariat.

It would also "discourage the involvement of [private landowners](#) in the

conservation of white rhinoceroses and undermine national and local rhino management strategies", it added.

The proposal would also apply more restrictions than in other countries where rhino populations were classified in the most endangered category.

An unprecedented 668 [rhinos](#) were slaughtered last year for their horns, which some people in Asia believe have medicinal properties. The claim is widely discredited.

South Africa has had a moratorium on rhino horn sales since 2009.

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