

South Africa mulls legal rhino horn trade

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An injured white rhino after poachers sawed off its horn on South Africa's Aquila Game Reserve in 2011. South Africa is exploring the legal trade of rhino horn to counter a poaching bloodbath that has surged despite tighter security controls, the environment minister says.

South Africa is exploring the legal trade of rhino horn to counter a poaching bloodbath that has surged despite tighter security controls, the environment minister said Thursday.

"We are investigating," minister Edna Molewa told AFP, saying cabinet had mandated the ministry to look into the matter.

The trade is banned internationally but it has been punted as a possible tool against the insatiable Asian demand for horn that is fuelling the [slaughter](#).

So far this year, 128 [rhinos](#) have been lost after a record 668 animals were killed last year.

No proposal has been introduced by South Africa to lift the ban at next month's meeting of the UN [wildlife trade](#) regulator CITES in Bangkok.

But Molewa said the discussions at the meeting will help guide South Africa's position.

"The reality of the matter is rhino horn is being poached in South Africa right now," she told a media briefing.

"There's a [moratorium](#) on trade in South Africa but they still get it out of South Africa. So we are saying let's look at other mechanisms."

Rhino horn brought in about \$60,000 (46,000 euro) per kilogramme, while a live animal cost just over half of that.

A study into rhino management had raised the unbanning of the trade and the commercial farming of rhinos, as a possibility.

With the world's biggest rhino population of around 20,500 animals, officials fear that the poaching kill-rate will one day outpace the number of baby rhinos being born.

"So far the mortality rate has not yet surpassed the maternity rate or the [birth rate](#), but we are watching that," said Fundisile Mketani, a senior official in the department.

South Africa has beefed up security controls, including sending an unmanned drone and soldiers into the world famous [Kruger National Park](#).

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