

# Baby rhino rumpus

## Wildlife groups tackle minister on backing export of calves to Vietnam

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ENVIRONMENTAL Affairs Minister Edna Molewa has been slapped with a public access to information application over government's support for the export of six white rhino calves to a Vietnamese zoo.

The application, made by endangered wildlife rights organisations, was served on the minister as she prepared for the second week of the 2016 Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species conference in Johannesburg.

The rhinos have been in quarantine awaiting export for three months. The application seeks copies of all documents submitted in support of the planned export and asks Molewa to suspend it until the paperwork is inspected.

The applicants want copies of letters from Vietnam's Cites management authority confirming the rhinos' horns will not be used for

commercial purposes.

The application follows last week's Cites secretariat announcement that Vietnam, with Mozambique, risked trade sanctions for lack of transparency on rhino horn trafficking. It said it would send observers to those countries to assess what law enforcement, prosecutions and seizures they were doing.

Mozambique is one of Africa's biggest conduits for this trafficking, much of it from South Africa. Vietnam is the world's rhino horn processing epicentre.

Cites lets countries export live rhino only to "appropriate and acceptable destinations".

The application came hours before South Africa was criticised yesterday by several neighbours for verbally supporting a Swazi proposal to allow limited, regulated trade in rhino horn. This proposal was vetoed in a secret ballot.

If the Cites observer mission finds against Vietnam and Mozambique it could leave South Africa unable to conduct certain trade with those countries.

Molewa said that for now she saw nothing wrong with the export plan.

"We are still awaiting further information on the destination. The animals are young and can adapt to

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conditions in zoos. We take our Cites responsibilities seriously and work within the confines of international laws.

Molewa said the department would engage NGOs, but they "must realise that wildlife trade cannot be done with emotions. We make our decisions based on scientific facts."

Suzanne Boswell Rudham of animal rights group Boots on the Ground said: "Emotional reaction is powerful and can change the world. Scientific 'rationale' can change the world. But the department is incapable of either. Its world is neither emotional nor rational. It's purely financial."

Allison Thompson, Outraged SA Citizens Against Poaching director, said: "In the past decade South Africa has allowed nearly 70 rhinos to be exported to Vietnamese zoos. This is despite Vietnam having only two known and approved zoos."