

MARK CARWARDINE



On the wild thoughts that won't let him sleep. This month:

Fighting for the trade ban

I'm desperately worried about South Africa's proposal to overturn a 30-year ban and legalise the international trade in rhino horn.

In particular, it plans to seek permission at the next meeting of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in 2016 for a one-off sale of its 16-tonne stockpile of rhino horns, worth some \$1 billion.

Vested interests in South Africa and elsewhere argue that legal trade will flood the market with rhino horn, thereby forcing the price to drop and reducing the incentive to poach. They say that it will also generate much-needed funds for conservation and take control away from criminal syndicates.

With increasing wealth in Vietnam and China, and a bigger Chinese footprint in Africa, demand for rhino horn is soaring: nearly three rhinos are being killed every day in South Africa alone.

But legalising the trade in rhino horn isn't the answer.

For a start, there would be no way of distinguishing between legal and illegal horns, even if user countries were to give a damn. So we'd be providing a laundering service for the illicit trafficking of illegal horns.

Worse still, legalising the international trade in rhino horn is more likely to cause an explosion in demand,

which will encourage yet more poaching. With fewer than 28,000 rhinos left in the world – and a potential market for rhino horn exceeding 1.5 billion users in East Asia – it will never be possible for supply to outstrip such insatiable demand.

Finally, this sends out mixed messages. Are we trying to reduce demand for rhino horn – or not?

And consider this: in 2002, CITES approved one-off sales of elephant ivory



“*Legalising the international trade in rhino horn may cause an explosion in demand.*”

stockpiles by four Southern African countries to China and Japan. The result? Poaching and the illegal ivory trade boomed to some of the highest levels in history.

How on Earth can we even consider making the same mistake again?

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