



tion agencies and asking them to please take their rhino as they can't afford to protect them."

"But what about a temporary suspension?"

"Suspending legal hunting will not stop poachers. It will devalue the rhino to the game reserve owner and disable him from protecting it. It is a matter of economics."

"What do you think is a solution?"

"In the 1960s the then Natal Parks Board - legally - sold rhino horns on the open market in Dar as Salaam, and there was also an internal sale to a Chinese merchant. The precedent was set. Along with others, I believe the time has come to sell the rhino horn that South African Conservation agencies and game ranchers have accumulated as a result of natural mortality. There is much opposition by the Animal Rights movement, with which I have sympathy because of the 'global swarming' of our own species; 7 billion people and rising, and desecrating the earth. However, the increased killing because of the high price, R 400 000/kg, means we have to devise other means of ensuring the rhinos' survival. Conservation agencies are desperately short of money. It is in the interest of both the rhino and conservation economics that we legalize the sale of

rhino horn accumulated through natural mortality. Our main task must be to protect the rhino populations inside national parks, game reserves and game ranches."

"Last year Michael Eustace read a paper at the Endangered Wildlife Trust Rhino workshop, in which he advocated the establishment of a central organization, similar to that of De Beers. Eustace describes in detail how it would work. Each horn going onto the market would be micro-chipped to establish its legality. As Michael Eustace rightly says, the ban on trade has simply pushed it underground, and into the hands of criminals, and made them rich while Africa's parks, which are in need of income, and where the income rightfully belongs, have nothing but costs."

Dr Player certainly answered all our questions and more. History usually does that.

Few will disagree that to stop the poaching and protect the rhinos it takes money, plain and simple be it for increased investigations, aerial support, increased patrols, or high tech equipment. Conservation agencies desperately need funds for many of their excellent programmes.

The rhinos ironically may save themselves if, and it's a big if, the stockpiles of

rhino horn, believed to be some 40 tons are legalised and sold. It's a long process with CITES, but the time has come as Dr Player points out, to start looking at the economics in order to save our rhino from departing the planet. At several hundred thousand per kg, you do the math on 40 tons. Is this enough to stop the poachers?

Dr Player ended our conversation by stressing it was through critical team work that Operation Rhino was so successful. "Without Dr Harthoorn who developed the drugs we would never have succeeded. It was Colonel Vincent and John Page in head Office who saw to the needs of equipment for us in the field. Nick Steele and Owen Letley and John Clark and Magqubu Ntombela risked their lives every day. They can truly be called dedicated but without our wives support we would not have been successful."

We finished our interview by him saying "Tell all the rangers out there not to be dismayed nor disturbed by criticism we had more than our fair share but we pressed on. As Nick Steel said - wildlife conservation is the noblest cause in the world today". **W**