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## South African Government announces their support to end the captive lion breeding industry in South Africa

### TIMELINE

**2 May 2021** – Minister Barbara Creecy announces that South Africa would no longer breed and keep captive lions or use captive lions or their derivatives commercially. [Read more below...](#)

**2 May 2021** – High-Level Panel Report made public with majority recommendations on captive lions. [Read more below...](#)

**2 May 2021** – Blood Lions Position Statement HLP report. [Read more below...](#)

**28 June 2021** – Minister Creecy releases a draft Policy Position Gazette on the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of elephant, lion, leopard and rhinoceros (Government Gazette No 44776). [Read Gazette...](#)

**29 June 2021** – Blood Lions statement on the release of the Policy Position document and its public participation process (Government Gazette No 44776). [Read more below...](#)

**Further info:** Captive lion breeding industry status based on recent Blood Lions research. [Read more below...](#)

### MINISTER'S ANNOUNCEMENT

Read the Minister's full speech [HERE](#).

Minister Barbara Creecy and the South African Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) have courageously taken the crucial and long-awaited step towards changing the status quo of the commercial captive lion breeding industry in South Africa.

Minister Creecy announced on Sunday, 2 May 2021, that South Africa would no longer breed captive lions, keep lions in captivity, or use captive lions or their derivatives commercially. She has instructed her Department to put processes in place to halt:

- The sale of captive lion derivatives, including the appropriate disposal of existing lion bone stockpiles and lion bone from euthanised lions.
- The hunting of captive bred lions.
- Tourist interactions with captive lions, including, so-called voluntourism, cub petting, etc.

“The [High-Level] Panel identified that the captive lion breeding industry poses risks to the sustainability of wild lion conservation resulting from the negative impact on ecotourism, which funds lion conservation and conservation more broadly, the negative impact on the authentic wild hunting industry, and the risk that trade in lion parts poses to stimulating poaching and illegal trade”, said Minister Creecy in her announcement.



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“In terms of captive lion and captive rhino breeding, where there were majority and minority recommendations, and having applied my mind, we will be adopting the majority recommendations on these issues”, the Minister said, which were supported by 62.5% of the High-Level Panel (HLP). The Department will be initiating processes to implement these [majority recommendations](#).

## In implementing the majority recommendations, the HLP proposes:

- Development of minimum standards for the welfare and well-being of captive lions.
- Development of minimum standards for health and safety in the workplace for workers at captive lion, including mitigating the risks of zoonotic disease transmission.
- A policy decision to prohibit trade in lion bones and derivatives.
- An immediate moratorium on issuing of permits for hunting of captive bred lions.
- Immediate amendment of permit conditions to exclude activities, such as tourist interactions.
- Immediate amendment of permit conditions to prohibit breeding and require the sterilisation of lions to prevent further breeding.
- No issuing of new captivity permits.
- Enhancement of mechanisms to prevent and avoid stimulating illegal trade in lion derivatives from captive facilities.
- Establishment of an independent committee to formulate a process for the ethical and humane euthanasia of captive lions and disposal of their carcasses.

## HLP RECOMMENDATIONS ON CAPTIVE LIONS

Download the full Ministerial High-Level Panel report [HERE](#).

*Below are excerpts from the HLP report pp 328-330.*

### Context:

**In respect of the breeding and keeping of captive lions in South Africa, the HLP recognises that –**

- The Parliamentary Portfolio Committee for Environment held a Colloquium on captive lion breeding for hunting in 2018, which resolved (reports No 167—2018) that “The Department of Environmental Affairs should as a matter of urgency initiate a policy and legislative review of Captive Breeding of Lions for hunting and Lion bone trade with a view to putting an end to this practice”.
- Rewilding of captive lions is not feasible from conservation principles and captive breeding is currently not necessary for conservation purposes.
- The commercial lion business involving intensive and selective breeding, handling, canned hunting and bone and other derivative trade presents a threat to South Africa’s reputation with associated political and economic risks including negative impacts on the broader photo-tourism market, and tourism to South Africa in general.
- The captive lion industry threatens South Africa’s reputation as a leader in the conservation of wildlife, and as a country and destination with iconic wild lions, as the housing of wild or captive-bred lions is perceived as the domestication of this iconic species.



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- There is a Lion non-detriment finding (NDF) that suggests that trade in captive trophies and captive live specimens and lion bones does not impact negatively on wild populations.
- The captive lion breeding and hunting industry presents a direct risk to the trophy hunting industry in terms of the hunting of wild lions and trophy hunting in general, and feeds the perception that we hunt farmed or semi-tame animals in SA.
- The captive lion industry provides very little economic activity benefiting a few relative to the other components of the sector, including relatively few jobs.
- The captive lion industry does not contribute meaningfully to transformation in South Africa.
- The captive lion industry does not contribute to the conservation of wild lions.
- The trade in lion derivatives poses major risks to wild lion populations in South Africa, including concerns raised by communities adjacent to Kruger National Park about increasing lion poaching in Kruger National Park, and, especially, wild populations in other countries with relatively low conservation funds to protect them.
- The trade in lion derivatives poses major risks to stimulating illegal trade, including through the laundering of poached parts.
- There are demonstrable (peer-reviewed) zoonotic risks associated with the intensive breeding and keeping of lions, which poses a high risk of an epidemic of existing or new zoonotic diseases, emerging in South Africa, and moving abroad; COVID-19 outbreaks have occurred in a number of animal species, including felids, with potential for mutation and back-infection to humans, and the World Organisation for Animal Health have listed lion as one of the species with a high susceptibility to infection.
- The captive lion industry does not represent ecological sustainable use.
- There is a presence of a large number of lions currently in captivity in many locations.
- There are major concerns over work conditions and safety of workers on lion farms.
- There are major concerns about the safety of tourists visiting these facilities and many attacks and fatalities have been reported.
- Although some operators may implement acceptable standards of welfare, there are major welfare contraventions in the industry in general.
- Investors in captive lion breeding, keeping, and use through hunting, interaction tourism, derivative sales etc. do so at their own risk, as with investment in any novel or developing industry.
- An existing stockpile of lion bones is registered with the Department.
- There are risks to employment, economy, and to the lions themselves associated with an immediate ban on trade with captive lions and derivatives.

## Goal

Given the above context, the majority of the HLP has agreed the following goal in respect of captive lions –

*South Africa does not captive breed lions, keep lions in captivity, or use captive lions or their derivatives commercially.*

## Recommendations

With a view to the achievement of the goal above, the majority of the HLP recommends the following –

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*Minister puts in place a process to halt and reverse the domestication of our iconic lions, through captive lion keeping, breeding, and commercial use, putting in place ethical and humane procedures for euthanasia of existing captive lions;*

and

*Minister puts in place policy decisions for an immediate halt to (1) the sale of captive lion derivatives, including the appropriate disposal of existing lion bone stockpiles and lion bone from euthanised lions, (2) the hunting of captive bred lions, and (3) tourist interactions with captive lions, including, so-called, 'voluntourism', cub petting, etc.*

and

*The Minister engages with other Departments and the SETAs (Sector Education and Training Authority) to identify mechanisms to protect employment of workers on captive lion facilities, including redeployment to other components of the wildlife sector, repurposing/retraining, and/or incorporation into the agricultural sector.*

## **In implementing these recommendations, the majority of the HLP proposes -**

- That minimum standards for the welfare and well-being of captive lions for accredited zoos, rehabilitation centres, and sanctuaries are agreed through an independent process (role-players, regulatory authority) and included in permit conditions, for as long as facilities continue to hold captive lions.
- That minimum standards for health and safety in the workplace for workers at captive lion facilities are finalised and implemented, including mitigating the risks of the transmission of a pathogen from the captive lions to humans (zoonotic spill over).
- A policy decision to prohibit trade in lion derivatives implemented through, for example –
  - a zero quota as an interim measure, and
  - an immediate prohibition in terms of Section 57(2) of NEMBA because of the negative effect on wild lions in terms of poaching for body parts, and laundering of skeletons, and
  - in the longer term, an amendment to Section 57(2) to make it broader, i.e. broaden from negative impact on wild population, such as negative impact on conservation and sustainable use more broadly, and to consider also animal well-being and human health, including from zoonosis.
- An immediate moratorium on the issuance of permits for hunting of captive bred lion. In the longer term, an Amendment of Regulation 24 and 26 of TOPS regulations to include lions as a listed large predator, and concerns raised by the HPL.
- Immediately amending the conditions of permit holders to exclude activities such as tourist interactions. In the longer term, to use the new clause 9A in the revised NEMBA for well-being of animals.
- That no permits should be issued for any new entrants into the field of captive lion keeping and breeding.
- The immediate revision of permit stipulations to prohibit new breeding, and to require the sterilisation of lions to prevent further breeding, or immediate euthanasia.
- The enhancement of mechanisms to prevent and avoid stimulating illegal trade in lion derivatives from captive facilities, including an audit of captive lions and the controlled disposal of skeletons.
- That the Minister establishes an independent committee to formulate a process for the ethical and humane euthanasia of captive lions, and disposal of their carcasses, in consultation with captive lion breeders and keepers, and other stakeholders.

*Below are excerpts from the HLP report pp 309-310.*



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## Context Live Export of the five iconic species

In respect of protecting our iconic biodiversity assets from international dilution through introduction outside of natural range, and enhancing their status within range states, the HLP recognises that –

- The export of wild elephants into captivity is not permitted under the Elephant Norms and Standards.
- Restrictions on the export of wild animals into captivity is permitted under CITES, and our current policies and processes allow this for rhino, lion, and leopard.
- Our international reputation as a leader in wildlife conservation, especially across Africa, could be enhanced or damaged through live export.
- Live export for in situ conservation purposes is allowed under CITES for the five species, and we pursue that.
- There is need to source individual lion, elephant, and rhino for in situ conservation reintroductions in many range states.
- South Africa is a world leader in conservation reintroductions and supplementations of these species, including knowledge and understanding, technologies, and technical competency.
- There is potential for translocations to promote our relationships and standing with other African countries in the collective conservation of the five iconic species; but there are concerns as to risks to our reputation from poor conservation practice at destinations.
- The transfer of wild animals into captivity in other countries has the potential to harm our reputation as a wildlife destination, in terms of the acceptability and appropriateness of the destinations, concerns over welfare and well-being at the destination, and the erosion of wildness through moving animals into captivity.
- The export of live rhinos and lion from South Africa to destinations known to consume horn and bones raises concerns regarding the extent to which these exports would be deemed to be humane and responsible.

## Goal

Given the above context, the HLP has agreed the following goal in respect of protecting our iconic biodiversity assets from international dilution through introduction outside of natural range, and enhancing their status within range states –

*Through custodianship and translocation between range states only, conservation status of our five iconic species is enhanced and maintained for present and future generations.*

## Recommendations

With a view to the achievement of the goal above, the HLP recommends the following –

*The Minister to initiate processes to engage with other range states of the iconic species to develop collective strategies for their conservation and custodianship, including for translocation, where appropriate, across range states, thereby leveraging our highly developed technical capacity in this regard.*

and

*The Minister **should investigate and where necessary prevent the export of live specimens of the five iconic species outside of their range states, or into captivity in other countries, thereby protecting their iconic African status, their welfare and our unique economic advantage.***



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## In implementing these recommendations, the HLP proposes –

- The need to engage with range states across Africa, and into Asia for lion, to develop a broader strategy for conservation translocation of these species in the collective interests of range states.
- The need to legislate through norms and standards, for species other than elephant, that no individuals may be moved from the wild into captivity other than for rehabilitation purposes;
- The need to legislate that no individuals of these species would be exported from South Africa other than wild individuals being trans-located to appropriate and acceptable **in situ** conservation destinations in range states.

## BLOOD LIONS POSITION STATEMENT HLP REPORT (2 MAY 2021)

The Blood Lions film and global campaign was launched in 2015 and has worked tirelessly to end this cruel and unethical industry and its spin-off activities. This announcement by Minister Barbara Creecy is highly significant and we commend the Minister in her decisive leadership to bringing an end to the commercial captive lion breeding industry. The Blood Lions team welcome the chance to play a role in assisting her, the various Departments and entities in the phasing out process to come.

We do however recognise that there may be grey areas in the HLP recommendations and proposed implementations (details in Appendix 1 below). We urge the Minister and her Department to be cognisant of such potential loopholes that could be utilised by the commercial captive lion breeding industry in continuing the various spin-off activities.

Given the considerable scale of farming and trade of captive lions in our country, the recommendations that came out of the HLP consultations concur with the views held amongst the global conservation community, welfare organisations, “ethical” hunting bodies and the general public, who all condemn the industry.

By implementing a ban on the use of captive lions and their derivatives, in conjunction with an immediate breeding ban and end to all activities involving captive bred lions, DFFE will effectively take the lead towards a more ethical and responsible South Africa. These are the first steps in shifting away from commodifying our wildlife, while moving towards a true “ecologically sustainable...use of natural resources”, as described in Section 24 in the Bill of Rights of our Constitution.

Opposing this brutal industry has been a long journey and Blood Lions’ ultimate goal has always been to end the captive lion breeding industry. After many setbacks, we sense an important change in attitude and we applaud the Minister, her department and the HLP.

Blood Lions congratulates the Minister on these bold steps and offer our full support in developing and implementing a responsible phase-out plan in order to ensure that the commercial predator breeding industry is successfully closed down in South Africa, once and for all.



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## **BLOOD LIONS STATEMENT ON RELEASE OF POLICY POSITION DOCUMENT AND ITS PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PROCESS (29 JUNE 2021)**

Download the full draft Policy Position document (Government Gazette No 44776) [HERE](#).

Minister Creecy of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) has now released a draft Policy Position Gazette on the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of elephant, lion, leopard and rhinoceros. This document is based on the recent High-Level Panel report and its recommendations and is now open for public comment for the next 30 days.

In terms of captive lions, the draft policy position provides a solid foundation for South Africa to move away from exploitative wildlife practices. Amongst others, it recognises that:

- the domestication of our iconic lion threatens South Africa's reputation as a conservation leader.
- the commodification of lions can damage our tourism brand.
- the trade in lion derivatives poses major risks to wild lion populations.
- the captive lion breeding industry is not in the wider public's interest.

Significantly, it acknowledges that we have a social and moral responsibility to act humanely, prevent suffering and ensure quality of life for those animals involved in the wildlife sector and suggests adopting the One Welfare approach. These are hugely positive first steps in shifting towards a more ethical and responsible South Africa.

Blood Lions fully supports the species management policy interventions for captive lions outlined in this draft policy position document, including but not limited to:

- Immediately halt domestication and exploitation of lion, and close captive lion facilities.
- Prevent live export ex situ of the iconic species (i.e. into captivity).
- Increased wildness, naturalness, and wellbeing of fauna.
- Adopt One Welfare approach.

We encourage all our supporters to comment on this draft Policy Position document through the appropriate channels and in particular your comments of support on the intended closure of the captive lion industry.

EVERY comment counts, including those of full support!

**Deadline for comments:** Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> July 2021

**Comments FAO:** Dr Kiruben Naicker

**Email:** [knaicker@environment.gov.za](mailto:knaicker@environment.gov.za)

## **CAPTIVE LION BREEDING INDUSTRY STATUS BASED ON RECENT BLOOD LIONS RESEARCH**

- **Captive facilities:** The official statistic in 2019 was 366 facilities, but research indicates an estimated 450+ facilities, including 97 captive hunting facilities, 133 facilities open to public & offering interaction, 61 offering volunteering opportunities, and only 10 sanctuaries.



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- **Number of captive lions:** The official statistic in 2019 was 7,979 lions in captivity, but research-based estimates are between 10,000-12,000 lions.
- **Tourism interactions:** Tourism activities that use captive lions for commercial gain include bottle feeding cubs, cub petting, ‘pay to walk’ with lions, selfie opportunities and volunteering.
- **Hunting Trophies:** South Africa exported **8,855** lion trophies under CITES between 2008-17 with the vast majority from the **captive lion population**. The top importing countries are USA, Spain, Russia, China and Canada.
- **Lion bones:** South Africa exported **6,634** lion skeletons under CITES between 2008-17 weighing a total of about 70 tonnes, all from the captive lion population. Top 3 importing countries are Lao People’s Democratic Republic (48%), Vietnam (44%) and Thailand (5%).
- **Live exports:** South Africa exported **1,895** live lions under CITES between 2008-17 (95% captive bred) for zoos and breeders overseas with China, Thailand, United Arab Emirates, Pakistan and Vietnam as the top importing countries.
- **Zoonosis research:** A peer-reviewed paper on [African Lions and Zoonotic Diseases: Implications for Commercial Lion Farms in South Africa](#) was adopted by the HLP. This joint World Animal Protection and Blood Lions research identified 63 pathogens associated with wild and captive lions and 23 human diseases that can potentially be transmitted from lions to people. The paper has also been developed into a popular science document [“Unpacking the Sick 5”](#).
- **Animal welfare research:** A research paper called “Welfare Challenges Relating to Commercial Captive Lion Breeding in South Africa” has been submitted to the Journal Animal Welfare and is awaiting publication. This review of scientific literature identifies some of the main challenges associated with caring for lions in captivity. It also highlights the apparent lack of scientific research involving commercial breeding facilities in South Africa, where animals are housed in large numbers, subjected to intense breeding practises and have regular contact with people.
- **Industry gap analysis:** A research paper called [“Ending Commercial Lion Farming in South Africa: A Gap Analysis Approach”](#) has been published in the peer-reviewed Journal Animals. Here we are using a “gap analysis” management tool to outline some of the key considerations necessary for a responsible and well-managed exit from the lion farming industry in South Africa.
- **SA Brand damage:** Over the years, significant brand damage has most likely been inflicted on South Africa’s tourism and conservation reputations through negative media attention in media coverage involving this industry. To give an indication of the potential brand damage, from January to mid-November 2020, 397 pieces of national and international media coverage were published with the keywords canned hunting, captive lion breeding and/or lion bone trade. This generated an estimated circulation of 1 billion people and an advertising value equivalent of nearly ZAR 29 million.

## More information:

- Watch the Blood Lions film [HERE](#).
- Find more information on Blood Lions [HERE](#) and YouthForLions [HERE](#).
- Follow Blood Lions on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) and Youth For Lions on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#).
- Watch Blood Lions YouTube channel [HERE](#).