



**CAPTIVE LION BREEDING FOR HUNTING IN SOUTH AFRICA: HARMING OR PROMOTING THE CONSERVATION IMAGE OF THE COUNTRY**

**DATE: 21ST & 22ND AUGUST 2018**

**VENUE: GOOD HOPE CHAMBER, PARLIAMENT, CAPE TOWN**

**CHAIRPERSON OF THE COLLOQUIUM: HON MR MP MAPULANE, (MP)**

**PRESENTATION BY EMS FOUNDATION AND BAN ANIMAL TRADING:**

***The Extinction Business: South Africa's 'Lion' Bone Trade.***

**21 AUGUST 2018**

1. Thank you to the Honourable Members for allowing Ban Animal Trading and the EMS Foundation to present the outcomes of our 18-month research and investigation into South Africa's role in the international lion bone trade, summarized in our report: ***The Extinction Business.***
2. The trade in lion bones is a major ethical, legal and administrative embarrassment for South Africa. We are confident that once the honourable members are aware of the true facts of this so-called industry, you will take the necessary steps to terminate it and hold the Executive to account for promoting this truly repulsive trade, which threatens our country's reputation.
3. Our research reveals how the Minister, her department and conservation agencies support and grow a trade which has strong links to international criminal networks, is providing a legal channel for the trafficking of illegal big cat parts, and is fuelling the demise of wild big cat populations.
4. Controversially, South Africa is *the* largest exporter in the world of 'lion' skeletons, bones and other body parts to countries that are at the nexus of the illegal wildlife trade.
5. There is a tsunami of domestic and international criticism against South Africa, with many conservation bodies, lion scientists and NGOs affirming that the

government's unfettered support for this rogue industry cannot be supported scientifically, or from a tourism, economic, conservation, ethical or welfare perspective.

6. DEA's 'lion' bone trade damages Brand South Africa's image and tourism. A vast number of individuals rely on continued employment in the tourism sector. Their livelihoods are in the firing line in order to benefit only the few predatory elite in the 'lion' bone trade. Tourism itself is a National Asset. South Africa faces an onslaught of bad publicity because of all the elements involved in this shocking trade. Tourists will rather choose to spend their money elsewhere. A new peer-reviewed scientific report undertaken by the *South African Institute of International Affairs* reveals that the Big Cat breeders could cost South Africa over R54-billion over the next 10 years in loss of tourism brand attractiveness.
7. South Africa only has somewhere between 1,300 and 1,700 adult lions remaining in the wild. Between 1993 and 2014 Africa lost 43% of its wild lion population, and it keeps plummeting.
8. Lions now face a new threat: a growing demand for their body parts, including their bones, teeth, and claws. These are sought after for use in bogus 'medicines' and jewellery, mostly in Southeast Asia. The legal quota creates and promotes parallel illegal markets for illegally obtained body parts to be laundered through "legal" markets. The legal export of bones from farm-bred caged lions allows the illegal export of wild lion bones to continue, and allows the market to thrive. It is also impossible to differentiate between body parts from wild and captive animals.
9. For the Minister to say that captive lions will serve as a buffer to potential threats to wild lion population survival, is irresponsible in the extreme and empirically untested. There is also not one lion scientist that has gone on record to say that this trade has any legitimate scientific or conservation basis. Most of them say that the decision is likely to do harm by encouraging trafficking in African lion and other Big Cat body parts.

10. The practices of the Big Cat breeding industry do not fulfil the constitutional insistence on 'ecologically sustainable development' that satisfies the stipulation 'for the benefit of present and future generations'.
11. The precautionary principle is important here, because it cautions that if current practices are likely to put the future viability of the wild lion populations at risk, such practices should be stopped.
12. The Minister's legalization of the export of skeletons from captive 'lion' facilities is not only incomprehensible, downright dangerous and promoting criminality, but she has now created a trade that could very well replace canned hunting as the breeders' primary revenue source.
13. Our study of skeleton exports for 2017 found that 91% included skulls. As hunters keep the skulls for trophies, this constitutes clear evidence that, contrary to DEA's assertion, the bone trade is not merely a by-product of the hunting industry.
14. We note with alarm that DEA and the provinces allow lion bones and skeletons to be stockpiled by private individuals and that the department uses this fact as a basis to increase the quota. By doing this DEA is actively supporting, growing and stimulating the demand for lion and tiger bones in countries that are working hard to eradicate this demand.
15. In Southeast Asia, lion bone masquerades as tiger bone. And in China, the demand for lion bone itself is increasing. This means that South Africa's 'lion' bone trade undermines both wild tiger and wild lion survival.
16. No data exists to support DEA's whimsical notion that providing lion bones to Southeast Asia reduces demand for tiger bone. To the contrary, the NGOs working on the ground in these countries report that the demand for tiger body parts is not dissipating in the least.
17. African Lions are listed on CITES Appendix 2. An annotation added to the CITES-listing at the 17th Conference of the Parties held in 2016, allows for the commercial trade in the body parts of captive-bred lions from South Africa, subject to a quota

as determined by DEA.<sup>1</sup> The annotation is lamentable, because it seeks to regulate something that should never have been recognised in the first place. It is important to state the obvious: South Africa is under no obligation through its multilateral agreements, such as CITES for example, to trade in lion bones. South Africa can take the decision TODAY to stop the trade in lion bones.

18. The response of the apologists for the industry, is that it is a regulated industry. However, it is clear that the regulatory system that has been developed, is fundamentally flawed and that it cannot be rectified.

19. The Minister this year effectively doubled the 2017 lion skeleton export quota of 800 skeletons to 1 500 skeletons, while in the midst of being served with papers demanding a legal review of her department's quota and policy. This incomprehensible decision was made without public consultation. It is also supposedly based on an interim research report, which clearly states that its research sample does not constitute a representative sample of the captive lion breeding industry.<sup>2</sup> By no stretch of the imagination can this interim study translate into a conclusive scientific justification for a lion skeleton quota, and even less, an increase of the quota. Notably, some of the researchers involved in this study have distanced themselves from the decision-making process around the 2018 quota, stating that all the decisions were made by the Scientific Authority and DEA, and that the researchers provided no input on what the quota should, or should not, be.

20. The Minister also claims that the lion bone trade is permissible because it is part of her department's 'sustainable use' paradigm. This simply is not good enough. DEA has not properly defined what sustainable use is. It has become a smokescreen behind which controversial decisions are rationalised, based on a narrow reading of section 24 of South Africa's Constitution, at the expense of broader biodiversity preservation commitments made in the same section. Moreover, a recent Constitutional Court Judgement clearly points to the need for a more 'integrative' approach, which requires the adoption of an attitude of respect

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<sup>1</sup> <https://cites.org/sites/default/files/eng/com/ac/30/Inf/E-AC30-Inf-15x.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Williams, V. & Rolfes, M, 2017: Interim Report 1: South African Lion Bone Trade, A Collaborative Lion Bone Research Project.

to the individuals who make up a species, an eco-system or the components of biodiversity.<sup>3</sup> But this is a discussion for another day.

21. Implicit in this quota is that government endorses and encourages the commercial breeding of lions and other Big Cats specifically for their bones, and also endorses and encourages illegal, unregulated cruel and brutal slaughterhouses which are now also part and parcel of this abhorrent and shameful industry.
22. We have been told that lions are kept for days in small cages that do not allow them to even turn around, drugged and shot while in the cages, that shots are missed, that the drugging process is cruelly executed and that lions are sometimes skinned while still alive.
23. Not only is the quota increase based on inconclusive research results, but the Deputy Director of *CITES Policy Development and Implementation* at DEA deliberately deceived the public by stating that the department had not determined a lion skeleton export quota for 2018 – this, more than a month AFTER the Minister had communicated the quota to the provinces.
24. The current South African permit system, a DEA responsibility that has been devolved to the provinces, is secretive and flawed and, instead of protecting our country's iconic wildlife, harms them. The system favours a handful of individuals who benefit financially, but who do not contribute to conservation in any way.
25. Drawing on CITES export permits, issued by South Africa's conservation agencies and obtained through Promotion of Access to Information requests, we found substantial problems and endemic loopholes in the CITES permit system, as well as with South Africa's enforcement and oversight processes. Our research also points to failings in national policies and procedures. All of this translates into a convergence of the legal and illegal trade.

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<sup>3</sup> Bilchitz, David. *Exploring The Relationship Between The Environmental Right In The South African Constitution And Protection For The Interests Of Animals*

26. Having a legal trade allows traffickers to easily pass off illegal products as legitimate, as is seen in the elephant ivory trade. There is no scientific data to support the idea that a legal trade in lion bones may offset illegal activity.

27. The current permit procedure allows for the quota to be managed by DEA. After an application for an export permit has been received, provincial conservation authorities inspect the lion skeletons at source.

- A DNA sample is supposedly taken of each skeleton, which is also individually tagged, and the results are kept at the National Zoological Gardens laboratory in Pretoria.
- Without any oversight from provincial conservation authorities, the exporter weighs and packs the bones AFTER the DNA testing and tagging has been completed. According to DEA, random DNA samples may be taken at the airport before export, and all consignments must be inspected and weighed at the ports of exit, in order to confirm the information contained in the relevant permit.<sup>4</sup> This is clearly not happening.
- Working with the 2017 lion bone export quota of 800 skeletons, the results of our research show that this process is unreliable, inherently flawed and that DEA is knowingly fuelling the illegal export market of lion skeletons.
- The results of our report damningly show that DEA oversaw the issuing of CITES permits for 870 skeletons and signed off on these exports. DEA may want to argue that all the permits were not used, but we verified each permit against actual exports. In fact, some of the allocated tag numbers were used twice.
- Our report, through an analysis of the weights of the big cat skeletons that were exported in 2017, reveals that it is likely that many more than 870 skeletons were actually exported. In fact, it could mean that at least twice or three times as many lion skeletons were exported than what was declared and it could also mean that tiger bones could have been included in the consignment.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.polity.org.za/article/dea-minister-edna-molewa-establishes-lion-bone-export-quota-for-2018-2018-07-17>

- Our findings reveal that DEA does not bother to verify the *bona fides* of either the South African traders or the international importers. Permits for the export of lion skeletons are issued to known animal trafficking networks and to fictitious addresses in Southeast Asia.
- There are major oversight problems in the countries of import as well.
- More skeletons than declared on the CITES permits are exported, and South African traders under declare the true value of the exports – in some cases fraudulently declaring only R500.00 per exported skeleton to customs. It is reported that in 2017, one kilogram of lion bone cost about \$880.00 in Vietnam. The traders are supposed to pay R550.00 for the DNA for every skeleton. Clearly things do not add up.
- DEA stamped and approved all the 2017 lion skeleton consignments at the airport.

28. When it comes to the economics of the 'lion' bone trade on the South African side – after all, this is what is driving the trade – very little is known about the modalities of the industry and/or the processes and mechanisms of how the money flows along the entire supply chain.

29. Access to this information and transparency is crucial, not only to understanding the nature of the trade, but in gaining insights into the illegal trafficking links. All of this, the South African government urgently needs to open up for public scrutiny so that it can be fully and accurately interrogated, understood, and the money trail investigated.

30. Apart from the obvious tourism, conservation, cruelty, welfare, maladministration and lack of oversight issues, the 'lion' bone trade is fundamentally part of illicit trade networks.

31. Our data shows overwhelmingly that there is a connection between South Africa's 'lion' bone trade and organised crime, with extensive links between importers of 'lion' bones and known wildlife traffickers and trafficking networks.

32. The key finding is that the legal trade is part of the illegal trade. They cannot be separated. It is likely that the legal trade in captive bred 'lion' skeletons and bones is being used as a cover by criminal syndicates to launder illegally obtained bones and skeletons from their wild caught counterparts.
33. Our findings show that the criminal networks involved in the illicit rhino-horn trade are linked to South Africa's lion bone trade. The link between rhino horn and 'lion' bone trafficking syndicates and the legal 'lion' bone trade in South Africa was already established and in the public domain as far back as 2011 with arrests in South Africa of members of the *Xaysavang Trafficking Network* - one of the world's most prolific wildlife traffickers. In fact the so-called pseudo-hunting of South African rhinos started with the export of lion bones to this Network. Surely DEA is aware of this?
34. More generally, South Africa plays a significant role in the illegal wildlife trade and indeed, alarmingly, is now one of the top countries in the world<sup>5</sup> for recorded wildlife trafficking occurrences.<sup>6</sup> Organised crime in South Africa is also shaped by external markets, such as Asia's insatiable desire for wildlife body parts.
35. There is overlay between seemingly legitimate business actors and organised criminal ones. This is of SERIOUS concern.
36. Organised criminal syndicates clearly do not have an interest in the conservation of South Africa's wildlife. The presence of these syndicates poses a serious security risk to the country, in addition to exacerbating the problem of illicit financial flows.
37. The only thing that can disrupt wildlife crime is the degree to which South Africa manages to contain it. Our State response to wildlife crime issues is weak and it does not have the huge resources necessary to tackle wildlife crimes.

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<sup>5</sup> Eighth

<sup>6</sup> *In Plane Sight*. A new Report on wildlife trafficking in the air transport sector. <https://c4ads.org/reports>

38. In closing, as NGO's and civil society we have a fundamental desire to work with government to secure South Africa's future and image; to fight corruption and crime; and to ensure that ethical and transparent policies are in place. Policies we can all be proud of, and which serve to protect the wild animals in our collective care.
39. Already, based on our Findings, the largest – and sole - airline exporter of 'lion' bones from South Africa to Southeast Asia - Singapore Airlines – has taken the decision to no longer support SA's big cat bone trade. Singapore Airlines has given the undertaking not to allow lion bone shipments to be carried on any of its flights.
40. We are humbly requesting the honourable members to:
- a) Place an immediate ban on the lion and other Big Cat bone trade for commercial purposes, including from captive sources. This needs to be applied nationally and provincially (provinces need to be instructed not to issue any CITES export permits for lion bones/skeletons). Included in this ban, should be the destruction of all Big Cat bone stockpiles.
  - b) Bring the criminal aspects of this trade to the attention of other relevant Parliamentary Committees and authorities to ensure that a forensic investigation and financial tracking of the industry is undertaken.
  - c) Urgently ensure that animal protection, welfare, care and respect is included in the appropriate environmental legislation, particularly in relation to the issuing of permits for the keeping, sale, hunting and exporting of wild animals and their body parts.
  - d) Close down the rogue Big Cat captive industry. We request that the Honourable Members instruct DEA and the Provinces to issue urgent regulations restricting the keeping and breeding of Big Cats.
  - e) Instruct DEA as a matter of urgency to provide a complete and audited list of all Big Cat breeding and keeping facilities nationally, and to make this list publicly available.
  - f) Instruct DEA to convene stakeholder meetings to discuss the dismantling of the captive Big Cat industry, including experts from the fields of animal welfare, sanctuary management and forensics, as well as NGOs.

g) Lastly, we would ask the honourable members to convene a Colloquium on “sustainable use”.

We hope that by bringing our concerns on this matter to the urgent attention of the Honourable Members that appropriate steps will be taken to stop this misnamed legal trade in its tracks.

**PETITION HANDED TO CHAIRPERSON OF THE COLLOQUIUM: HON MR MP MAPULANE**

In a matter of a few weeks almost a quarter of a million people signed petitions in 2017 and in 2018 against South Africa’s lion bone trade

Lion 800 bone quota 2017: 118,000 signatures

Lion 1500 bone quota 2018: 130, 666 signatures

***Additional in-depth information can be made available to the honourable members if required.***

For a link to *The Extinction Business: South Africa’s ‘Lion’ Bone Trade*:

<https://emsfoundation.org.za/wp-content/uploads/THE-EXTINCTION-BUSINESS-South-Africas-lion-bone-trade.pdf>

We thank you most sincerely for your attention.



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