

# PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY 5 / 6<sup>th</sup> 2019

## *“Community perspectives on benefit-sharing and the ethics of hunting in the western boundary of the Kruger National Park”*

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1. By way of introduction, I have been studying lion ecology in the Greater Kruger Park Region for 20 years, including the 5 years I spent in the APNR from 2000 to 2005, conducting the first study of lion ecology in the APNR since the fences were dropped between the Timbavati, Klaserie and Umbabat Private Nature Reserves around 1993.
2. As you have heard from my colleague, Linda Tucker, and you will hear from the Acornhoek and KhoiSan community members, the lion, and more specifically the white lion is culturally significant to the Tsonga, Sepedi and KhoiSan people, and is therefore a fundamental part of their cultural heritage, and consequently their beneficiation. Beneficiation needs to be redefined to acknowledge Indigenous knowledge and cultural beliefs, that do not only place a sustainable utilization value but also a cultural or intrinsic value on lions and other wildlife. The trophy hunting by the APNR of lions potentially carrying the rare white lion gene, and the forced removals of the white lion from ancestral land to which it naturally belongs, is therefore putting this cultural and global heritage at risk.
3. The study by Legendijk & Gusset (2008) determined that the lion is culturally significant to the local communities on the western boundary of the Kruger Park near Manyeleti. Moreover, it determined that being an animal of cultural significance, these communities did not advocate the killing of lions despite incidents of human-lion conflict. Other global studies have had similar findings for snow leopard in Nepal and jaguar in South America.
4. The cultural value of an animal or species to Indigenous communities is recognized as an important reason for protecting species and ecosystems, internationally by organisations such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN/SSC 2013) and locally by SANParks' Large Mammal Specialist, Dr Sam Ferreira (as he stated in an interview of the 50/50 Nature Program in 2014).
5. Over the 5 year period that I was based in the APNR, I worked closely with the reserve management and attended the Joint Committee Meetings between the APNR and SANParks, gaining a clear understanding of management policies in the APNR and how management decisions are made. Especially in terms of lion management and trophy hunting.

6. During the time I was based in the APNR, 4 pride male lions were trophy hunted, and there have been several incidents of pride males being hunted subsequently. This is in breach of the APNRs own hunting protocol, and more importantly in contravention of globally recognized ethical and responsible ecological principles, since lions that are commanding their apex position in a given pride stabilize the pride dynamics in that region, and are recognized to have earned this position through excellent genetic traits.
7. In my term at the APNR, no policy was put in place to protect the occurrence of a rare genetic strain of *Panthera leo* that is evidenced, through continued births to multiple prides in the APNR, to be a natural occurrence to the specific region under today's Inquiry. Despite its continued natural occurrence in the APNR, this genetic rarity has been put at risk through ongoing artificial removals, specifically the trophy hunting practices conducted in the region in question.
8. There is a high probability that the trophy hunted pride male lions were carriers of the rare white lion gene, since these males were the dominant males of the prides that gave birth to successive litters of white lion cubs born between 2006 and 2015.
9. There is a high likelihood that the most recent example of the trophy hunting of a lion in the APNR, identified as Skye, is another example of the removal of a white lion gene carrier, but the validity of this can only be determined if access is granted to the trophy itself, for genetic testing. The fact that the lion named Skye has never been seen again is strong evidence in support of this lion having been hunted.
10. It needs to be put on record that very little scientific study has been done on white lions, yet much misinformation has been disseminated about them, in the absence of scientific evidence.
11. The misinformation that white lions lack camouflage and cannot survive in the wild is refuted by the study of Turner, Vasicek and Somers, published in 2015. Based on comprehensive data gathered over a 10 year period, this study proved that white lions hunt as successfully as non-white (tawny) lions that were studied in the same free-roaming area. The findings from this study were published after peer-review by Dr Marion Valeix, who was at the time the senior lion scientist from Oxford's WILD Conservation Research Unit (WildCRU). Eye witness accounts published in the book by wildlife manager Mario Cesare in 2011, similarly confirm white lions surviving successfully in the wild. More recently, despite the continued destabilization of the prides and pride genetics in this region through commercial trophy hunting practices in the APNR, two white lionesses have survived against all odds, by moving out of the APNR into a neighbouring area called Rietvlei, where there is less threat to their survival.
12. There is also a likelihood of the movement of lions from the APNR into neighboring KNP due to the risks associated with trophy hunting in the APNR, which may have led to the occurrence of white lion cubs being sighted in this neighboring area.
13. Importantly, the frequency of occurrence of white lions in the APNR and central Kruger Park has repeatedly increased since their first recorded sighting in 1937, with 12 births to

9 different prides from 1975 to 1980 and 17 births between 2006 and 2015.<sup>1</sup> The frequency of occurrence of white lions increased until management interventions by the APNR and Kruger Park, through artificial removal from the Timbavati in the 1980s, and depletion of the gene pool through lion culling programs in the Central District of KNP in the 1960s, 70s and 80s, and trophy hunting in the APNR from the 1960s to date.

14. It is significant to note that such a unique variant should continually recur in one specific region, despite continual forced removals from its natural habitat, confirming the white lion is a natural occurrence. This is in accordance with the cultural belief of the indigenous peoples that the white lion naturally occurs in this region for a particular reason.
15. What is needed to ensure the protection of the white lion in the region of its origin is a shift in paradigm. Conservation management policies evolve over time as new knowledge is acquired. For example in the 1960s, 70s and 80s it was believed that there was an overpopulation of lions and spotted hyaena in the Kruger Park that were causing the decline in zebra and wildebeest numbers, and therefore significant number of lions and hyaena were culled. It was then determined that there was not an overpopulation of these predators; rather, the decline in zebra and wildebeest was due to human intervention, too many artificial waterholes which disrupted the natural movement patterns of these plains animals making them more susceptible to predation.
16. To be more successful in ecosystemic planning, the APNR and SANParks Agreement needs to shift in paradigm, such that it respects rather than dismisses Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), and incorporates these important knowledge systems into local policy and national legislation. International precedents such as that of the Spirit Bear in British Columbia (Canada) have helped illustrate how effective such new paradigm thinking is for long-term sustainability of a country's greatest natural assets. The Spirit Bear is a white colour variant of the Black Bear that is culturally significant to the First Nations Kitasoo People, but is also a flagship animal for protecting the biodiversity of the entire ecosystem, and is therefore protected by law from being hunted. **Consequently, it is recognized that the beneficiation of these indigenous communities is not received through trophy hunting but by being true stakeholders in the benefits of land custodianship, access to renewable resources, and ecotourism within the greater conservation area, the 4 000 000 ha Great Bear Rainforest.**
17. In the same way, a moratorium on lion trophy hunting needs to be put in place in the APNR to protect the unique white lion of this region. To allow the hunting protocols to be adequately reviewed, and the frequency of occurrence study to be conducted in this region, a moratorium would need to be in effect for a minimum 3 year period.
18. Since the genetic marker (DNA code) for the white lion was successfully identified in 2013 (Cho *et al.* 2013), the frequency of occurrence of the white lion gene in the APNR and Kruger Park can now be determined and gene carriers identified. A moratorium is therefore an essential next step in national policy-making, which will enable the country to protect the gene pool and gene carriers in the region under Inquiry, to ensure that this

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<sup>1</sup> Robinson & De Vos (1982); Cesare (2011)

local and global cultural heritage fundamental to the beneficiation of the communities on the western boundary of the Kruger Park is adequately preserved for future generations.

19. The important role that the Associated Private Nature Reserves have played in extending the borders of the KNP is widely recognized both historically and in the current inquiry. But trophy hunting must be in accordance with ethical, responsible conservation management, and cannot be at the expense of a local and global cultural heritage.

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