

MEDIA RELEASE BY SA HUNTERS AND CUSTODIANS OF PROFESSIONAL HUNTING AND CONSERVATION

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Responsible hunting organisations denounce shooting of captive-bred lion

There is increasing pressure on all forms of wildlife-based tourism and enterprises in the wildlife sector to become more sustainable and to generate income and benefits without significant deterioration of the environment and natural resources, whilst also addressing social responsibility.

The latter directly affects the “social licence” of an enterprise to operate, whether involved in photographic tourism, hunting, game ranching and breeding, or animal welfare. This is especially important for the future of hunting, which is globally exposed to increased scrutiny.

“It is critical that those organisations in the wildlife sector that support responsible wildlife utilisation, peg their colours to the mast to demonstrate and improve their performance as responsible citizens”, says Lizanne Nel, conservation manager for SA Hunters and Game Conservation Association (SA Hunters).

In a joint presentation to the Parliamentary Colloquium, SA Hunters, the biggest local hunting and conservation organisation that primarily represents local consumptive hunters, and the Custodians of Professional Hunting and Conservation (Custodians), a newly-formed professional hunting association, strongly opposed the shooting of captive-bred lion. Both organisations regard this practice as morally and socially unacceptable, stating that the shooting of captive-bred lions does not comply with the principles of fair-chase hunting and the requirements of hunting to be sustainable and socially responsible.

According to Custodians, the damage caused by the shooting of captive-bred lion in South Africa is detrimental to the wildlife industry and not worth the estimated 8% it contributes to the annual income generated from international hunting tourists. Similarly, it forms a minute part of the R10.8 billion that the hunting sector in South Africa adds to the country’s economy every year.

“Hunting is an important driver in growing the wildlife economy that outperforms the national economy and provides viable socio-economic development opportunities in rural economies. Hunting bans and restrictions resulting from reputational damage to the sector are hurting the industry,” says Nel.

The community-based forum in the Delta in Botswana lost R9.4 million and 200 jobs when Botswana banned hunting. Similarly, the splurge of international trade and transport restrictions and bans following protests and lobbying by animal protectionist groups after the hunting of “Cecil” and the release of “Blood Lions”, contributed to the closure of 50% of hunting concessions in Tanzania.

These concessions are now vacant because it is no longer financially viable to manage these areas. “This has significant conservation implications as independent research studies confirm that hunting concessions in Africa play an important role in anti-poaching operations whilst securing in excess of 1.4 million square kilometres for wildlife in 23 countries in Africa”, says Nel.

Data available from the Department of Environmental Affairs clearly indicates that the annual number of international hunters visiting South Africa has seen a dramatic decrease of 28% from 2011 to 2016. At an average expenditure of approximately R262 000 by an international hunter per

trip, the country has lost almost R288 million in direct income from trophy hunting between 2014 and 2016, as a result of the reduced number of visiting international hunters. Further decreases can be expected with the trade restrictions by the United States of America (USA) that specifically target the hunting of captive-bred lion from South Africa on the grounds that such hunting does not enhance the conservation of wild lion populations.

SA Hunters and Custodians are among more than 20 hunting organisations across the globe that reject the shooting of captive-bred lion. In Africa, the Outfitters and Professional Hunters Associations of Africa (OPHAA) that represents eleven hunting organisations from nine countries where hunting is allowed, including Botswana, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe, stated explicitly that they promote legal and ethical fair-chase, sustainable hunting in Africa. OPHAA condemns the artificial breeding of wild animals for the hunting industry. In 2017, OPHAA stated that “the shooting of captive-bred lion brings the entire hunting industry in ill-repute and jeopardises conservation efforts and livelihoods generated by well-managed and ethical hunting operations”.

Globally, the most prominent international hunting associations in North America and Europe explicitly stated that hunting selective and captive-bred game is not in the spirit of “fair-chase” hunting. “Doubtful conservation contribution” was further raised as a reason for opposing the shooting of captive-bred lion. The above-mentioned organisations include the International Council for Game & Wildlife Conservation (CIC) that represents a wide range of organisations and individuals engaged in hunting and conservation from 86 countries around the world; Dallas Safari Club (DSC), with in excess of 6000 members around the world that support conservation, education and hunters’ rights; and Safari Club International (SCI) representing approximately 55 000 members, all oppose the shooting of captive-bred lion.

Several of the international hunting shows in Europe and the USA have also taken a decision to not allow the marketing of captive-bred lion hunts at their venues. Additionally, 72 countries and 409 national and international non-governmental organisations that are members of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the biggest conservation organisation in the world that supports the notion of sustainable use, voted in favour of a motion to terminate the hunting of captive-bred lion and other predators at its last congress in 2016.

It should be very clear that it is not only protectionist organisations that oppose shooting of captive-bred lions, but organisations worldwide, including major hunting associations, that support responsible wildlife utilisation. It should further be noted that the opposition of responsible hunters to the shooting of captive-bred game, is not the result of pressure of protectionist organisations. As early as 1997, the Sport Hunting Code for Africa referred to fair chase; enhancing of wild populations; ensuring humane practices in the utilisation of wildlife; and that a “hunted animal should exist as a naturally interacting member of a wild sustainable population located in an area large enough for it to breed, forage and hunt freely.”

It is clear that the drive towards economic, environmental and social responsibility is high on the agenda of prominent responsible hunting organisations and several are collaborating on initiatives towards this end. “SA Hunters and Custodians are committed to this cause and welcome open and constructive debate on captive breeding of lion and responsible hunting. We remain optimistic that a solution will be found to restore faith in the South African conservation model and the benefits that responsible wildlife utilisation, including hunting, can generate for society and the conservation of our wildlife heritage”, says Nel.

SA Hunters and Custodians appeal to all role players in the wildlife sector to take heed of the recommendations in the King reports on corporate citizenship and good governance that urges organisations to identify and assess direct and indirect environmental impacts together with financial and social risks, in a manner that goes beyond compliance and from both an ethical and a business opportunity perspective.

This appeal is also directed towards protectionist groups and the media, because the unintended consequences from uninformed and biased reporting and social media campaigns may end up having a much bigger negative impact on wildlife conservation especially in developing countries where people are dependent on the income and benefits generated by responsible use of the wildlife they live with.

The End

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