



HUNTING ADVOCACY STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN HUNTERS' AND GAME CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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Re-position Hunting in the SAHGCA Milieu

At the SA Hunters and Game Conservation Association, we believe that hunting is far more than just a lifestyle activity. It is part of who we are, a way of life, our culture, our heritage, and our connection with nature. It is how we put wholesome food on our tables and provide for our families.

INTRODUCTION

We live in a society where, globally, hunting and our hunting heritage, as well as other outdoor pursuits, are threatened by:

- radical extremist groups that oppose hunting and/or sustainable use, influencing public opinion, policy and legislative matters which affect hunting and conservation;
- a disconnect in younger generations between what nature provides and how we use it;
- unsustainable and irresponsible use of wildlife;
- ignorant and irresponsible hunters who harm the image of, and the positive contribution by, responsible hunters and hunting;
- apathy and inaction of responsible hunters and SAHGCA in promoting and defending responsible hunting and our hunting heritage;
- a government, legislation and policy frameworks that do not advance sustainable use as an integral part of our constitutional right towards protecting the environment; and

These threats are further fuelled by the fact that wildlife populations are under increased pressure from rising human populations, climate change, habitat destruction, and the general public becoming increasingly removed from the realities of the cycle of life and death. The requirements of meaningful conservation are misunderstood by the public, and there is no indication that this will change soon. Pressure to stop all forms of sustainable use of biodiversity, particularly wildlife, will continue unless we take action to prevent it.

The voices of the extremist groups appeal to people's emotions and their lack of awareness of the realities facing the conservation of wildlife. They are often well-organised and well-financed. Therefore, it is crucial that SAHGCA better positions itself to address these threats and serve as the voice for responsible hunters and their positive contributions to society. We need to continue engaging with all sectors to support conservation and sustainable use, and to determine effective mechanisms to secure the future of responsible hunting. Herein, SAHGCA needs to maintain its reputation and flexibly portray, to the outside world, the image of an association committed to upholding conservation-based, responsible-use principles while instilling pride in our members as stewards of our wildlife, hunting, and outdoor heritage.

Fred Eichler, a renowned hunter and fisherman, author, and avid hunting advocate, coined the term “Anti-hunting Hunters” to describe the degree of apathy and lack of solidarity often exhibited by the hunting and fishing communities. We must address this attitude, which has become the norm among South African hunters. Our hunting heritage is taken for granted, and often we choose not to get involved. Unfortunately, the threats to hunting are often not large, significant events, but rather a series of smaller processes that erode at hunting as part of our heritage, its contribution to conservation, its role in food security and rural socio-economic development. We need members to better understand these processes and become involved in protecting our hunting heritage.

WHY PROTECT RESPONSIBLE HUNTING?

- Hunting is part of the cultural heritage of South Africans.
- Hunting is an integral part of the outdoor lifestyle of many South Africans and forms an essential part of nature-based tourism.
- The money paid by responsible hunters for their hunt serves as income for landowners to fund conservation actions, including the conservation of wildlife habitats and associated species. This not only contributes to the survival of hunted and other species but also supports national conservation targets.
- The contribution of the hunting sector makes up a substantial portion of the wildlife sector’s socio-economic contribution to the economy, specifically in rural landscapes where it, among others, contributes to food security, job creation and improves the livelihoods of people.
- Hunting is an effective strategy in the suite of wildlife management tools, including managing game numbers.
- Hunters harvest free-range healthy protein as part of their livelihood strategy, contributing to national food security.

PRESERVING OUR CULTURE AND PRIVILEGES TO HUNT

Preserving our hunting culture depends on the following:

- Acknowledgement of hunting as central to South Africans’ cultural heritage;
- Sustained healthy wildlife habitats and populations;
- Sensible legislation;
- Recognition of the substantial contribution that responsible hunters make to rural socio-economic development as part of the nature-based tourism sector;
- The knowledge that hunters are responsible users of nature and caring custodians of our wildlife heritage;
- Acknowledgement that the meat from free-range game is a livelihood strategy that contributes to food security;
- Hunters’ understanding and pride in actively advocating their contribution to conservation, food security, and the economy, including instilling responsible hunting values in the next generation.

PRINCIPLES OF RESPONSIBLE HUNTING

The following principles should apply:

- Obey legislation on firearm ownership, conservation and hunting, and insist that others do the same.
- Always act responsibly, honourably, and ethically.
- Hunt according to fair-chase principles, where the skill of the hunter and the prey are tested in their natural habitat with a reasonable chance of escape.
- Use technology in a way that does not diminish the importance of developing hunting skills or reduce hunting to just shooting.
- Measure success not in the quantity of game taken, but in the quality of the hunt
- Hunt in areas where the funds paid for the hunt contribute to the conservation of species and associated habitats.
- Hunt with consideration for animal welfare and limit the suffering of the prey by:
 - not taking risks, only responsible shots
 - effective shot placement
 - firearm proficiency and use of effective calibres
 - bear in mind the biology and social behaviour of species
 - killing any injured animal as quickly and as humanely as possible
- Support sustainable use practices that contribute to healthy game populations.
- Aspire to ensure that all parts of the hunted animals are used optimally.
- Care for and respect all game and the ecosystems in which they occur.
- Show respect for the hunted animals and do not display them in an undignified or disrespectful manner.
- Interact with landowners and host communities in a responsible and respectful manner.
- Act as mentors by building a positive image of hunters, introducing people to hunting and helping to improve their knowledge and skills.
- Prioritise safety because it is essential, including the responsible and safe use of firearms.
- Take pride in the decisions they make while hunting and taking full responsibility for their actions.
- Act with respect towards non-hunters and the media and strive to build positive relationships.
- Explain the role of responsible hunting in conservation, wildlife management, food security, and socio-economic development in a constructive manner.

GOALS/EXPECTED OUTCOMES

What do we want to achieve with this strategy?

1. A radically improved image of hunting, hunters, and SAHGCA, promoting responsible wildlife use and wildlife custodianship.
2. Identify and manage threats to our hunting
3. Secure our hunting heritage for future generations.
4. Acknowledge responsible outdoor activities, including sustainable use of wildlife through hunting and fishing, as healthy daily activities.
5. Meaningful conservation based on sound sustainable use principles that considers social, ecological, and economic aspects.
6. Promote responsible hunting as a healthy alternative to off-the-shelf protein and a mechanism to bolster food security.
7. Accept responsible hunting as an effective strategy in sustainable socio-economic development that improves the wellbeing of rural communities.

To achieve these outcomes and secure the future of our hunting heritage for future generations, the following objectives should be addressed:

	ACTIONS	MEMBER	BRANCH	NATIONAL OFFICE
1	Get hunting recognised as an integral part of the cultural heritage of SA			
1.1	Engage with the relevant authorities and stakeholder groups to legally recognise hunting as part of our cultural heritage.			X
2	Secure sensible legislation and policy in support of sustainable use, inclusive of responsible hunting.			
2.1	Participate in all relevant forums and processes.			X
2.2	Take legal action as a last resort. - Continue with the legal case against the use of the term wildlife <i>wellbeing</i>			X
2.3	Build a dedicated SAHGCA advocacy fund, for this purpose, including legal action (consider crowdfunding options)			X
2.4	Collaborate with local and international organisations on important aspects. - AWCF - OPHAA - CIC ⁱ			X
3	Persistence of well-managed indigenous wildlife populations and natural habitats			
3.1	Remain committed to conserving and enhancing natural habitats by promoting sound management	X	X	X

	and responsible use of wildlife that hunters and non-hunters can enjoy.			
4	Radically improve the image of hunting, hunters, and SAHGCA through responsible wildlife use and wildlife custodianship.			
4.1	Review our codes of good practice for responsible hunting and ensure that its principles become part of SAHGCA's culture.			X
4.2	Empower hunters to understand and actively advocate for the contribution of responsible hunting to their cultural heritage, conservation, food security, and socio-economic development.	X	X	X
4.3	Highlight and instil responsible hunting values among our members that they can support and be proud of.	X	X	X
4.4	Enhance and demonstrate the specific role that hunters play in conservation.	X	X	X
5	Identify and manage threats to our hunting heritage			
5.1	Stay ahead of the animal rights extremist attacks by preparing responses proactively.			X
5.2	Respond to attacks on sustainable use and responsible hunting through the various platforms and in conjunction with other pro-sustainable use organisations.			X
5.3	Instil an appreciation for our natural and hunting heritage in the next generations through positive, practical experiences.	X	X	X
5.4	Ensure increased collaboration and solidarity between SAHGCA and other like-minded organisations.			X
5.5	Ensure consistent positive communications and publications that portray hunting in a positive light.			X
6	Promote hunting as an activity that contributes to a healthy lifestyle, and game meat as a healthy protein.			
6.1	Actively promote the outdoor recreation economy with a specific focus on hunting.	X	X	X
6.2	Package hunting in terms of health goals, such as participating in outdoor activities versus a sedentary lifestyle, e.g., counting steps on smart watches and benefits for kids.			X

6.3	Develop a Wild Harvest Campaign that demonstrates the benefits of free-range wild protein harvested through responsible hunting.			X
7	Promote sustainable use, in general and hunting in particular, as a sound strategy for food security, conservation, and sustainable socio-economic development, thereby improving the wellbeing of the people of SA.			
	<i>This should focus on relevant stakeholder groups, which may require different approaches. These include the following key stakeholder groups:</i> <i>Scientific community: they provide the science that supports informed decision-making and policy at various levels</i> <i>Uninformed public: hunting needs a social contract from the public to continue operating. This is also the voter base</i> <i>Government and politicians: they have a major influence on the policy and legislative framework</i> <i>Conservation sector: if they understand the positive contribution of hunting to conservation, they will promote it as part of a solution to sustainably conserve our wildlife heritage</i> <i>The mainstream media and social media platforms</i>			
7.1	Scientific community - Complete hunting reports and publish results. - Process hunting reports and publish the results. - Participate in scientific forums to both gain insights into and influence current research and trends, and present relevant data - Participate in and facilitate research that support responsible hunting and conservation	X		X X X
7.2	Uninformed public - Develop an innovative Wild Harvest Campaign, focused on game meat as a healthy protein - Use conservation initiatives to highlight the role of responsible hunters and hunting in conservation - Hunters Care Campaign: a photograph with a strong key message demonstrating that hunters care and contribute to conservation and society - Use public events to promote responsible hunting and SAHGCA, such as the	X X	X X	X X X

	Jacaranda Golf Day or big rugby events, and e.g., partner with Crown National - Expand our reach to other audiences by participating in smaller, locally supported shows and events - Utilise the firearm outlets to promote the tenets of SA Hunt and Conservation		X	
			X	X
7.3	Government and Politicians - Engage one-on-one with relevant national and provincial ministries, including Agriculture, Environment, Tourism - Engage parliamentary portfolio committees - Participate in relevant government forums and programmes - <i>Game Meat Day/Week: (Brussels, November 12, 2024 – European Game Meat Week 2024 has marked an exceptional collaboration among FACE Members – Europe’s national hunting associations – to promote game meat as a sustainable and ethical food choice that supports both wildlife conservation and cultural heritage. During the week (4-10 November), FACE Members highlighted the benefits of game meat under the hashtag #GameMeatWeek. It reached almost 2 million “impressions” on social media.)</i> - Make better use of opportunities at HuntEx to promote the hunting sector and the benefits of responsible hunting to politicians and the government.		X	X X X X X
7.4	Conservation Sector - Participate in relevant conservation forums/initiatives to gain insights into and influence current thinking and approaches, to present relevant data and information, and forge productive partnerships - Promote conservation		X	X
		X	X	X
7.5	Media - Proactively engage media through positive exposure, using press releases, media days and events to bolster conservation and responsible hunting - Address negative media through press releases or rebuttals - Use the national Facebook page to increasingly inform members about current hunting matters and to promote responsible hunting. (Develop a series of memes that promote one responsible hunting principle per week.)		X	X X X

	- Engage with local celebrities to act as SAHGCA ambassadors for responsible hunting			X
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CONCLUSION

Hunting plays a major role in providing sustainable finance for the conservation and management of wildlife habitats in South Africa. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) recognises this role and supports the notion that responsible and sustainable use of wildlife can contribute to the conservation of species and wildlife habitats. Unless these areas remain competitive with other land uses, the alarming rate of land transformation away from conservation-oriented uses will continue, placing an increased burden on the government to find alternative solutions for delivering the public goods and ecosystem services required by society.

For hunting to continue, it must maintain a social contract with the public at large. This requires that hunting as a cultural activity be seen to be conducted responsibly, and that its contributions to conservation, food security, and the economy be clearly demonstrated. SAHGCA must ensure that the image of hunting and hunters is portrayed in the best light to both the public and politicians.

This strategy was developed to primarily focus on gaining recognition that hunting is part of South African culture; for fostering a culture of responsible hunting and wildlife management; advocating the positive contributions that responsible hunting and hunters make to conservation, food security and the economy; ensuring an enabling a legal framework for responsible hunting to flourish; and lastly, counteract misinformation by extreme animal rights groups. This will provide guidance to the association, not only at the strategic level, but also to branches and members, helping them focus on areas where they can have the greatest impact and ensuring we all work together to preserve our culture of responsible hunting.

ⁱ X

African Wildlife Consultative Forum (AWCF), Operators and Professional Hunters Associations of Africa (OPHAA) and the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation (CIC)