



Press Release - For immediate release



Is South Africa on the brink of a radical re-think about the future of its wildlife?

International wildlife charity, the Born Free Foundation, believes Report on lions, rhinos, elephants and leopards signals the end of globally condemned practice of canned lion hunting.

This weekend, South Africa's Environment Minister Barbara Creecy, spelled out a new direction for the country and its efforts to conserve some of the world's most iconic species. Based on the conclusions of the 600 page High Level Panel Report which took on board wide stakeholder evidence and the views of national and international experts, including Born Free, who participated in the 2018 Parliamentary Colloquium on lion farming, the Ministerial Statement sets out a road map for change in the years ahead.

"South Africa may be standing on the verge of a new, more wildlife-friendly future" comments Will Travers OBE, co-founder and Executive President at Born Free. Head of Policy Dr Mark Jones added ***"We applaud the Panel and the Minister for seeking to draw a line under an issue that has for so long blighted South Africa's reputation."***

There are an estimated 300 lion-breeding facilities in South Africa holding perhaps 10,000 captive-bred lions. Minister Creecy stated: ***"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"***.

The use of leopard skins for religious and cultural purposes makes leopard hunting a complex matter to resolve. Restricting the killing of leopards to problem animals, as has been previously proposed, leaves the process open to interpretation and ongoing abuse. Born Free believes that the hunting of leopards, even if it is more narrowly defined, should be halted. Only animals that

represent a direct and verifiable threat to human life should be subject to human intervention, with lethal intervention being the last resort.

Rhino horn trade will undoubtedly dominate the work of the proposed Rhino Committee of Inquiry. However, the issues are clear. Rhino ranchers who wish to sell rhino horn are currently only able to do so legally at national level and this has proved far less lucrative than they had hoped. International rhino horn trade is banned under the Convention on International Trade in Endanger Species of Fauna and Flora - and every time proposals have been brought forward to seek approval for limited trade they have, quite rightly, been soundly defeated. International law-makers and most conservation experts agree that any easing of the current restrictions is likely to stimulate demand and result in increased poaching pressure on wild rhino populations across Africa and Asia. Born Free hopes that the Rhino Committee of Inquiry will conclude that international trade should not be contemplated, that national sales should once more be prohibited through the introduction of a carefully constructed moratorium which will withstand legal challenge, and that a comprehensive package of financial support should be offered to conservancies with wild rhino to help offset their significant security costs.

South Africa has consistently aligned itself with the minority of African elephant range countries who seek to relax current rules which prohibit the international sale of ivory. However, that may be about to change with the High Level Panel signalling that South Africa may, at least, wish to significantly pause in its pursuit of ivory sales. The majority of African Elephant Range States, as represented by the African Elephant Coalition, together with wildlife organisations such as Born Free, have long argued that sporadic 'one off' ivory sales, or even talk of such sales, fuels speculative poaching which, according to some, accounts for one elephant being poached every 15 minutes. At the same time, many destination/consumer countries, including the USA, China, the UK and others, have tightened or all but eliminated domestic sales of ivory, while increasing their law enforcement efforts. It really is time to take speculation about a future, legal, international ivory trade off the table.

However, it is on lions that the Minister has been most progressive, perhaps in response to not only national but international pressure, informed by films such as the multi-award-winning **Blood Lions**. The evidence provided by Born Free, amongst others, has made the despicable practice of breeding lions in captivity by the thousand for exploitation and inevitable execution, as part of the canned hunting industry, a truly toxic activity.

Dr Mark Jones, Born Free's Head of Policy, stated: *"For many years we have called for an end to South Africa's cruel and cynical predator breeding industry, which breeds thousands of lions and other predators for the sole purpose of generating profits through bogus tourist activities, canned hunting, and the export of lion bones and other products. Our award-winning animation **The Bitter Bond**, seen by over 11 million people worldwide, helped bring lion breeding and canned hunting to international attention, and resulted in nearly a quarter of a million people signing our petition calling on the South African authorities to bring a humane end to the industry. It seems the authorities have listened to us and the many others who have campaigned on this issue. We applaud the Panel and the Minister for seeking to draw a line under an issue that has for so long blighted South Africa's reputation."*

Will Travers, Born Free's co-founder and Executive President, concluded: *"While the issue of trophy hunting remains highly contentious, Minister Creecy has made some brave decisions, but it is important that she is not alone. Born Free and others, with decades of experience in captive animal care and international wildlife trade, stand ready to engage with her directly to offer advice and insights as to how to take matters forward and, in particular, bring the dreadful canned lion*

hunting industry to a compassionate and humane end. South Africa may be standing on the verge of a new, more wildlife-friendly future."

More information about Born Free's campaign to end canned hunting (including our award-winning film *The Bitter Bond* and our approach to the wider issue of Trophy Hunting can be found here: www.bornfree.org.uk/great-betrayal and www.bornfree.org.uk/articles/trophy-hunting-facts

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Notes to Editor:

About Born Free

Born Free was founded by Bill Travers and Virginia McKenna, who starred in the movie classic, *Born Free* (1966), together with their eldest son, Will. Born Free's mission is to ensure that all wild animals, whether living in captivity or in the wild, are treated with compassion and respect and are able to live their lives according to their needs. Born Free opposes the exploitation of wild animals in captivity and campaigns to keep wildlife in the wild.

Born Free promotes Compassionate Conservation which strives to enhance the survival of threatened species in the wild and protect natural habitats while respecting the needs of and safeguarding the welfare of individual animals. Born Free seeks to have a positive impact on animals in the wild and protect their ecosystems in perpetuity, for their own intrinsic value and for the critical roles they play within the natural world. For more information about Born Free please visit: www.bornfree.org.uk

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