



Panthera Statement on South Africa's Proposed Quota for Lion Skeleton Exports And Its Impact on Wild Lion Populations

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New York, NY – In a highly controversial move, South Africa's Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) recently announced plans to formalize the country's legal trade in captive-bred lion skeletons, proposing to institute a quota of 800 skeletons per year eligible for export permits. The number of captive-bred lion carcasses legally exported from South Africa—primarily feeding a growing market among upwardly mobile Asians for luxury products such as lion bone wine—has grown exponentially since 2007, as lion bones have begun to fill demand for increasingly scarce tiger bones.

Panthera, the global wild cat conservation organization, condemned the quota as arbitrary and potentially devastating for wild lion and critically endangered tiger populations. Panthera is calling on the DEA to institute a moratorium on lion bone exports, effective immediately.

“The government's proposed quota of 800 lion skeletons for legal export has absolutely no grounding in science,” said Dr. Paul Funston, Senior Director of Panthera's lion program. “It is irresponsible to establish policy that could further imperil wild lions—already in precipitous decline throughout much of Africa—when the facts are clear; South Africa's lion breeding industry makes absolutely no positive contribution to conserving lions and, indeed, further imperils them”.

Dr. Funston continued, “It is confounding that a country whose iconic wild lions are such a source of national pride—not to mention tourist revenue—would take such risks to sustain a marginal captive breeding industry that is condemned globally for its shameful practices. The legal farming of lions for tourists to bottle feed, pet, and ultimately hunt in tiny enclosures is a stain on South Africa's reputation as stewards of Africa's wildlife.”

Proponents of the captive lion trade argue the industry reduces demand for wild lion parts, thereby benefitting wild lion conservation. However, there is significant evidence that South Africa's legal trade in captive-bred lion trophies is accelerating the slaughter of wild lions for their parts in neighboring countries and is in fact increasing demand for wild lion parts in Asia—a market that did not exist before South Africa started exporting lion bones in 2007.

Recent anecdotal data and press reports from neighboring countries show an increase in lion killings for their bones and parts:

- In 2016, 90% of lion carcasses from Limpopo National Park, Mozambique had skull, teeth, and claws removed
- Rates of poisoning of lions specifically for body parts have increased dramatically in Niassa National Reserve, Mozambique
- A 6kg consignment of lion claws and teeth was found in an illegal rhino horn apprehension in Maputo in 2016
- In northern Namibia in 2016, 42% of lions killed in the Zambezi Region of Namibia (n=17), had their heads, feet, tails, skins and claws removed. In a previous spate of lion killing in the region in 2014 no body parts were removed from 20 lions that were killed

Panthera President and Chief Conservation Officer, Dr. Luke Hunter, added, “There is not one shred of scientific evidence showing that canned hunting and legal lion bone exports take the poaching pressure off wild lion populations. In fact, it is increasingly clear that these practices stimulate demand for wild lion, leopard and tiger parts throughout the world. The CITES mandate to limit captive-bred lion skeleton exports from South Africa was a step in the right direction; with global pressure mounting on the government to ban canned hunting, we may soon see the end of this reprehensible industry.”

Background

Wild lion populations are on a steep decline, with only 20,000 remaining today, down from 30,000 just two decades ago. The species faces a deadly matrix of threats in the wild, ranging from conflict with people and bushmeat poaching to habitat loss, unsustainable trophy hunting and the emerging threat of poaching for the illegal wildlife trade.

Panthera’s Project Leonardo leads or supports initiatives in 15 African nations to bring lion populations back to a minimum of 30,000 individuals within 15 years.

About Panthera

Panthera, founded in 2006, is devoted exclusively to preserving wild cats and their critical role in the world’s ecosystems. Panthera’s team of leading biologists, law enforcement experts and wild cat advocates develop innovative strategies based on the best available science to protect cheetahs, jaguars, leopards, lions, pumas, snow leopards and tigers and their vast landscapes. In 50 countries around the world, Panthera works with a wide variety of stakeholders to reduce or eliminate the most pressing threats to wild cats—securing their future, and ours. Visit panthera.org