

Southern African Feline Focus (SAFF)

Quarterly Briefing



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Issue 1 – October 2025



Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the Southern African Feline Focus (SAFF) quarterly briefing round-up, published by Richard Peirce and Voice4Lions. Our aim is that the SAFF will build into a reliable chronological record of events that we feel should be highlighted covering news, events, our own work and developments in the field of Southern Africa's captive and wild cat populations.

End 2024/Early 2025 – Over a period of three months Richard conducted interviews with sixteen individuals who were stakeholders in South Africa's captive lion breeding (CLB) sector. Richard was able to get opinions reflecting the views of breeders, conservationists, scientists, tourism and those engaged in animal welfare and those able to give legal opinions. Inevitably there was little agreement. However, a commonly acknowledged thread was that for many years the South African government had encouraged lion breeding and its various spin-off activities. The same government is now seeking to curtail those activities, and one stumbling block to putting in place legislation will be the legal challenges that will be mounted by breeders and others involved in this industry. Many of the events and developments listed in the timeline which follows relate to both sides of this debate which looks set to dominate big cat news in South Africa far into the future.

April 22, 2025.

<https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2025-04-22-sa-government-continues-to-defend-odious-trade-in-tigers/> Adam Cruise wrote in the Daily Maverick how the SA Government had missed an opportunity to protect tigers in South Africa. "Tiger farming is a significant animal welfare problem, with issues including indiscriminate breeding, crowding, inappropriate housing systems, genetic abnormalities causing acute suffering, inhumane slaughtering practices, poor diet and early removal of cubs from mothers."



July 11, 2025 – Richard Peirce & Voice4lions wrote a joint open letter to the Honourable Narend Singh requesting clarification of contradictory remarks which had been made in an address given by Minister Dion George on 19 June reflecting on his first year in office. The clarification asked for was around an ambiguous comment on lion breeding which could have been read to infer that the government was considering continuing with past policy towards a ban, or was actively considering allowing the trade in lion bones and body parts. No response has been received apart from an acknowledgement of our letter.

July 30, 2025 – https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/minister-dion-george-wildlife-ranching-south-africa-202425-hunting-quotas-30?fbclid=IwY2xjawNXOqdleHRuA2F1bQ1xMQABHpZA3TBM3HjcUvuXS0XKCZP5WRoIODEKraqJujq9ZO8bhpIFdBOTjXTsy4ob_aem_yEC7N_8zO5R8wXyXimREmQ

Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Dr Dion George, notes recent public statements by Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA) that misrepresent the legal process before the High Court regarding the 2024 and 2025 national hunting and export quotas.

August 7 2025 – <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/drc-authorities-rescue-three-lion-cubs-arrest-six-operation-dzenga-yv8nf/> Three lion cubs from South Africa were seized in the DRC. According to reports, the cubs were trafficked from South Africa and transited through Zambia, with their final destinations intended to be Brazzaville before ultimately reaching the Middle East. The co-ordinated rescue operation was spearheaded by the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (ICCN), with crucial technical and logistical support provided by Conserv Congo.

August 10, 2025 – World Lion Day. This year it coincided with the 10th anniversary of Cecil being shot and killed in Zimbabwe by an American dentist called Walter Palmer. This event triggered enormous coverage by media right across the world and provided an increased impetus to those seeking to ban trophy hunting.

August 15 2025 – Voice4lions sent a letter to Minister George and the Deputy Minister requesting an update on his position with regard to captive lion breeding (CLB). No reply received to date.



August 19 2025 – <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2025-08-19-purported-value-of-trophy-hunting-for-sa-is-overblown> . South Africa's Daily Maverick published a letter by Ros Harvey which contained a comprehensive and very valuable analysis of CLB and its ramifications.

September 1, 2025 – <https://currencynews.co.za/exposed-the-big-business-of-selling-south-africas-big-cats-to-ambanis-indian-mega-zoo> An article by journalist Daniel Stiles exposed the commercial selling of South Africa's big cats to Ambani's Mega Zoo in India.

September 12, 2025 – https://www.dffe.gov.za/mediarelease/george_decisionnottoset24.25citesexportquotas Minister Dion George announced that he would wait for the outcome of a court case by WRSA before setting hunting quotas.

September 16, 2025 – <https://news.mongabay.com/2025/09/poisoning-crisis-could-drive-vulture-extinction-in-south-africas-kruger-region> Commenting on research carried out by EWT (Endangered Wildlife Trust) Sean Mowbray writing for Mongabay on the vulture poisoning crisis in the Kruger National Park noted that lion populations had been negatively affected in the north of the park. “Mowbray said that according to EWT research there were two scenarios involving the poisoning of lions. There was the direct targeting of lions and also there was when lions were poisoned by accident but were not the targeted species. The EWT report went on to note that in the last couple of years most of the lion mortalities had been caused by snaring when lions had been caught in snares put out to catch bush meat. When hunters find a lion in a trap they harvest the body. Multiple lion parts including stomach fat, claws, teeth, tails and paws have high values both in the local trade where they are used in traditional medicine, and in the international wildlife trade sector”.

September 18, 2025, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/adams-cassinga-464b375a_another-major-step-against-wildlife-trafficking-activity-7374731379323920384-wWIL a suspected wildlife trafficker was arrested in Lubumbashi (Haut-Katanga Province) in possession of a full lion skin. The arrest was triggered by intelligence and was assisted by Conserv Congo which provided technical support. The individual confessed to operating within a cross-border trafficking network linking poachers and buyers in both the DRC and abroad. The lion skin was smuggled from Zambia into Congo earlier this year.

September 18, 2025 – <https://www.businesslive.co.za/fm/fm-fox/2025-09-18-claws-out-over-the-future-of-captive-lions/> The Financial Mail published an article by Mike Cadman detailing the current status of government moves to close down captive lion breeding (CLB) and its very spin-offs.

September 22, 2025 – Minister Dion George posted in the Government Gazette Notice Number 53394 notice of intention to set a zero export quota for trade in lion bones for the 2025 calendar year in terms of regulation 3(2) (K) and (F) of the convention on international trade in endangered species of wild fauna and flora regulations, 2010 (CITES regulations) and sections 99 and 100 of the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act, 2004 (Act no. 10 of 2004). That this notice appeared so late in the year indicates the slow working of government.

October 2, 2025 – <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2025-10-02-department-of-environment-reduces-lion-bone-export-quota-to-zero/> Don Pinnock writing in the Daily Maverick discussed the recently published notice by Minister Dion George advising of his intention to set a zero quota for the trade in lion bones for 2025.



October 7, 2025 – The select committee on Agriculture, Land Reform and Mineral Resources met to discuss the draft amended TOPS Regulations and the Lion Prohibition Notice. A PowerPoint presentation was given by DFFE and the committee agreed that they would have to hold a workshop in order to inform themselves properly on both topics.

October 9, 2025 – Voice4Lions sent an official letter to the Director General of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment requesting clarification of seven points arising from the Government Gazette Notice No. 53394 which is open for public comment.

October 15, 2025 – Voice4Lions & Richard Peirce (SAFF) sent a joint letter to the Director General of the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment re zero bone quota announcement as there appeared to be some confusion among the public regarding the scope of this Notice. Certain commentators seemed to have interpreted it as indicating a permanent zero quota, extending beyond 2025. We have asked for urgent clarification on whether the Notice pertains solely to the 2025 calendar year (as we believe) or if it signals a longer-term policy position.

Holding Tight By Adam Park

