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# Global White Lion Protection Trust briefing

Committee:

- [Land & Environmental Affairs](#)

## Meeting Report Information

Date of Meeting:

20 Feb, 2008

Chairperson:

Rev P Moatshe (ANC, North West)

Documents handed out:

[Global White Lion Protection Trust Presentation](#)

[White Lion Protection Plan](#)

[Chronology of Formal Engagemens wi the Sa Government, Regional Communities and Parks and Tourism Stakeholder](#)

[White Lion Conservation, Culture and Heritage Presentation by Linda Tucker](#)

[White Lion Conservation, Culture and Heritage Presentation by Wendy Strauss](#)

Audio recording of the meeting:

[Briefing by Global White Lion Protection Trust & SANParks on concerns surrounding the White Lions; Consideration & Adopt](#)

Summary:

The Global White Lion Protection Trust briefed the Committee on their mission statement, background, motivation, conservation value of white lions, principles of their reintroduction programme, cultural value of white lions within African societies, eco-tourism value and scientific evidence.

The Trust outlined that white lions were an endangered species. However due to uncontrolled trophy hunting and poaching activities in Timbavati, Kruger National Park, the population of white lions had been dwindling at an unprecedented scale. They noted that there was need to legislate against trophy hunting of white lions as they held conservation, cultural, and eco-tourism value amongst Africans. The Trust was facing challenges in their attempts at reintroduction of white lions in the Timbavati area because of a vacuum in the legislation.

Questions from the committee focused on why there was particular focus on the white lion, the kind of legislation the Trust wanted, economic value of the project, importance of the project to surrounding communities and

how the department was interfacing with communities. Concern was expressed that the National Parks had not, as requested, sent someone to make a presentation, claiming instead that the white lions did not fall within their jurisdiction.

Minutes:

### **Global White Lion Protection Trust (the Trust) : Briefing on White Lion protection**

Ms Linda Tucker, CEO, The Global White Lion Protection Trust, briefed the Committee on the mission statement, background, motivation, solution based approach, conservation strategy and the need for legislation against trading and hunting of white lions within the Timbavati region of the Kruger National Park.

She outlined that there was urgent need for the government of South Africa to come up with legislation to protect and conserve the rare white lions that were currently facing extinction, owing to uncontrolled trading and hunting activities. She said that there was no legislation that protected this unique and naturally occurring genetic species from becoming extinct. Being endemic to the Timbavati region, white lions were a significant contribution to the biodiversity of that region. The AmaShangaan and other indigenous peoples in South Africa revered the white lions, regarding them as sacred.

She pointed out that after their well-publicised ‘discovery’ in the 1970s, the white lions were artificially removed from the wild to captive breeding and hunting operations. These captive operations, as well as zoos, specifically bred white lions because of their rarity and exploited them for financial gain. Along with the artificial removals, continuing trophy hunting of pride male lions depleted the gene pool, contributing to the drastic decline in the frequency of white lions and ultimately to twelve years of extinction in the wild. Unethical and ecologically irresponsible hunting of lions had taken place in this region up until as recently as May and October 2006.

The artificial removals of white lions had continued actively over the past three decades, and would continue to take place unless white lions were specifically listed for protection. She added that past legislation in South Africa, as well as recently proposed Norms, Principles and Standards for the Management of Large Predators, did not prevent the white lion from being removed from the system and in effect wiped off the earth.

She also outlined the principles of the Trust’s White Lion Protection Plan, which sought to protect and conserve white lions at a national level. The reintroduction of the white lions back to their natural habitat represented a critical landmark in conservation history. She proposed that the canned trophy hunting industry be outlawed as it had no conservation and cultural value for affected communities.

Under the reintroduction programme, The Trust was using pedigreed white lions whose lineage was directly traceable to Timbavati. Successes had been recorded, in that a number of unimprinted white lions had been reintroduced to the semi- free roaming conditions in a 300 hectare control area. The reintroduction programme was in line with current strategies for

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lion conservation that aimed to contribute to the meta-population management approach that had already been implemented for other lions in Southern Africa. In order to completely introduce the white lions back to the wild, and ensure genetic diversity, the Trust aimed to establish and manage a number of separate subpopulations before considering the integration of white lions with resident prides in the Timbavati Private Nature Reserve itself.

She also outlined that white lion species were important not only because of their conservation value but also because of their cultural value. White lions symbolised cultural and spiritual significance in traditional African belief systems, hence deserved the highest reverence and protection possible. She also highlighted the deleterious effects of in-breeding in white lions. She proposed a four-point solution based approach to the government to deal with this matter urgently and also pledged a 15-point promise to the government in return.

Mr Jason Turner, Lion Ecologist Scientific Advisor, the Trust, pointed out that the Trust was in the process of establishing a scientific research centre and cultural heritage centre on its property in the greater Timbavati region, dedicated to the conservation and preservation of this unique animal. He highlighted that the conservation paradigm emphasized sustainable use, community participation and education and cultural upliftment instead of the western paradigm that glorified profits.

Ms Wendy Strauss, Senior Communication Partner, the Trust, also noted that in terms of economic value, rural areas had not been benefiting from canned trophy hunting and trading activities. She cited land ownership patterns as a major impediment to benefits trickling down to the poor.

Despite the revenue potential of the conservancies, current practices were dampening the poverty alleviation potential of the projects.

### *Discussion*

A member expressed concern at the response by members of the South African National Parks that the issue of white lion conservation was not within their jurisdiction. He proposed that the Committee must invite the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism to answer and explain this matter, as their failure to respond fully could be seen as disrespect to the Committee. He pointed out that in terms of the legislation government had the responsibility to help the Trust. He urged the Committee to ensure the speedy implementation of regulations to protect white lions, as entrepreneurs were making a lot of money due to loopholes in the legislation. He asked the Trust to name and shame farms that were currently involved in illegal canned trophy hunting. He asked the representatives of the Trust how the white lion was managing to coexist with other prides of lions within the Timbavati region.

Mr M Mzizi (IFP, Gauteng) referred to the “colour bar” of lions, and asked why there was specific focus on the white lion and not on other prides of lions. He also wanted to know which generation of lions did the white lion come from, and whether it was a cross breed.

Ms Linda Tucker responded that the issue of targeting white lions in their preservation and conservation went beyond the issue of colour, but was rather concerned with the level of extinction and lack of conservation

concern by entrepreneurs involved in trophy hunting and its sub-industry. She highlighted that white lions had no problem in hunting for themselves, as some of the reintroduced prides in the Timbavati region were self-sufficient.

Mr L Van Rooyen (ANC, Free State) expressed concern at the refusal by National Parks to accept full responsibility for the preservation and conservation of white lions. He said it seemed there was a clash of cultures in the whole issue and urged the Committee to ensure white lions were protected, given their sacred symbolism within African societies. He emphasised that it was government responsibility, and particularly provincial government, to deal with perpetrators of canned trophy hunting within the Timbavati region. He was suspicious as to why National Parks were not buying into the white lion conservation and preservation issue.

Mr D Worth (DA, Free State) wanted to know why the National Parks was not protecting the white lions, knowing too well the deleterious effects of trading and hunting. However he was sceptical of the wholesale ban on canned trophy hunting as proposed by the Trust. He also mentioned the issue of inbreeding as beneficial to some extent, as inbred lions were usually released into the wild for integration purposes.

Ms B Dlulane (ANC, Eastern Cape) expressed her utmost concern with National Parks' failure to send representatives to present in line with the Committee's invitation, instead of sending observers who did not have position papers. She felt that the Committee had been let down

The Chairperson proposed that the present members of the Department / National Parks should not be allowed to answer any question. He queried their inactivity despite the issue falling within their jurisdiction.

The Chairperson assured the Trust representatives that the Committee fully supported their efforts and would ensure that the white lions were protected by legislation. He advised that the National Parks must be prepared to answer for their failure to present to the Committee. He added that the protection and conservation of the white lions had to be treated a matter of urgency, given its conservative, eco-tourism and cultural value.

A Member of the committee proposed that perhaps the Committee should organise a trip to Timbavati region so that they could see for themselves and make informed decision based on those findings.

The Chairperson concurred with the member and said that the Trust had already extended an invitation to the Committee, which would indeed make the necessary arrangements for a visit.

Mr Worth asked the Trust representatives to identify pertinent legislation and propose how the legislation should be redrafted. The legal advisors would then attend to the matter.

The Chairperson thanked the Trust members for coming for the second time. He said this Committee would ensure that the matter received the urgency it deserved.

The meeting was adjourned.

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