

Appendix I - A Wildlife Friendly Future for Tourism in South Africa

Trophy hunting is not a “New Deal” for South Africa’s wildlife

On 2 May 2021, Minister Barbara Creecy and her Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) announced her proposal to adopt the New Deal for People and Wildlife, as outlined in the draft Policy Position on the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of elephant, lion, leopard and rhinoceros. This draft policy position¹ outlines a vision of “ecologically sustainable use of iconic species” and improved regulation of the status quo with the intention of repositioning South Africa as a “destination of choice for legal, humane, regulated, and responsible hunting”. However, this vision of South Africa as a ‘globally competitive hunting destination’ risks further damaging South Africa’s global reputation due to the growing scope and scale of public anti-trophy hunting sentiment. For decades trophy hunting has been at the centre of controversies in conservation and tourism circles due to the ethical implications of killing animals for recreation and trophies²⁻⁷, and there have been calls for ethical concerns to play a fundamental role in justifying conservation activities⁷⁻¹⁰.

Moreover, public concerns and discomfort about the ethics of trophy hunting have intensified in recent years, particularly since 2015 after the killing of “Cecil” the lion by an American dentist in Zimbabwe¹¹. The killing of Cecil sparked huge global outrage and anti-trophy hunting sentiment¹¹⁻¹⁵, considerable negative media attention over the practice of lion trophy hunting^{16,17}, and a series of published debates about the ethics of trophy hunting followed^{5,13,18}. Cecil’s death also sparked a global societal expression of care for lions and wildlife in general¹⁹, with over 13,000 people making donations to WildCRU (who had been studying him) raising over US\$1 million¹³.

More generally, research shows that public values and attitudes are shifting away from an anthropocentric view where humans dominate over wildlife and towards a more mutualistic and animal-welfare view²⁰. Furthermore, social media platforms are becoming a space where the public are increasingly becoming engaged in environmental and animal welfare issues^{21,22}. It is thought that this shift in public attitudes will lead to increased social pressure towards a compassionate ethical model of tourism²² and against trophy hunting activities in the future^{7,23}. Therefore, negative public attitudes towards trophy hunting should be considered when assessing the consequences of South Africa’s draft policy position on trophy hunting because they can undermine public trust in conservation with negative impacts on public support for conservation policies^{24,25}.

There are also specific concerns over the negative consequences of trophy hunting on species populations, biodiversity, and wildlife conservation^{7,8}. For example, higher rates of decline in lion and leopard populations have been observed in areas with trophy hunting compared to areas without in Tanzania²⁶. Moreover, selective hunting of lions has been shown to increase infanticides and population decline due to replacements of the dominant males that are often targeted^{14,18,26-29}. Furthermore, because social bonds within a group of lions is vital for survival, the killing of a group member causes distress and disturbance in the pride¹⁴. Trophy hunting also has detrimental impact on endangered species due to poor management and ineffective policies³⁰, and through the increased value and targeting of rarer trophy species^{18,31}. The loss of iconic animals because of trophy hunting is a high ecological and environmental price to pay. Bull elephants, for example, are increasingly reproductively successful over time³²⁻³⁴ and are especially important for sustaining the integrity of elephant populations³⁵. African forest elephants have also been shown to have significant carbon sequestration value because they reduce forest stem density, promoting growth of larger trees that absorb more carbon³⁶.

Wildlife friendly tourism is the “New Deal” for South Africa’s wildlife

In its current form, a substantial proportion of South Africa’s wildlife tourism economy is built around ‘consumptive’ practices that involve the deliberate killing of animals, such as trophy hunting. In contrast, ‘non-consumptive’ tourism allows for viewing animals in natural environments³⁷ which can be considered as ‘wildlife friendly’ if managed responsibly. The draft policy position for the conservation and intended ‘ecologically sustainable use’ of elephant, lion, leopard and rhino in South Africa outlines plans for significant changes throughout the sector and provides an opportunity for South Africa to truly deliver on its promise of a “New Deal” for wildlife, but only if trophy hunting is rejected and wildlife friendly tourism is promoted to maximize its potential.

Active, well-managed, ecotourism programmes provide opportunity for wildlife protection, inject money into local economies, and can result in good conservation outcomes and positive local community development³⁸⁻⁴⁰. Therefore, consumptive tourism practices such as hunting are not necessary to achieve these benefits. For example, one study that analysed the economic value of rhinos in the Kruger National Park in South Africa found that the total values of non-consumptive use per rhino exceeds consumptive use values by a minimum of 50%⁴¹. This is because tourists can pay to view the same animal multiple times over into old age, compared to the trophy hunter’s one-time fee for a life cut short⁴².

A transition to a wildlife-friendly approach will also benefit South Africa’s tourism sector in the long term. Observing wildlife is a major travel motive of tourists and plays an important role in their destination selection process; this demand for ‘pure’ wildlife tourism is growing rapidly, as is competition among wildlife destinations, thus destinations will need to secure competitive advantage⁴³. Wildlife-friendly alternatives, such as photographic tourism, which generate jobs while at the same time help to conserve the ecological integrity of the landscape⁴⁴, are increasingly incompatible with trophy hunting, especially when carried out in the same areas. Evidence suggests that concerns around negative impacts could deter potential tourists from selecting South Africa as a destination, undermining initiatives which are building its reputation as a responsible tourism destination (e.g. creating one of the world’s first Whale Heritage Sites in 2019⁴⁵), and hindering its national target to become one of the top 50 destinations worldwide⁴⁶.

The scope and scale of support for wildlife friendly tourism

Support for wildlife friendly tourism is proliferating throughout the international travel sector. Studies have shown many tourists are becoming increasingly reluctant to support activities that are deemed unethical and there is a growing interest in animal welfare in tourism contexts²² that is leading millions of tourists, particularly from the global west, to choose non consumptive animal experiences⁴⁷⁻⁴⁹. There is growing demand for attractions deemed “sustainable”, “eco” and “ethical”⁵⁰, where the focus is on participating in the ‘animal gaze’ – i.e. non-consumptive wildlife encounters⁵¹.

Although we acknowledge that most of the focus of the international debate surrounding trophy hunting has been on the largely anti-hunting views of the Western public – recent studies have shown the views amongst some African communities have expressed resentment towards the neo-colonial character of trophy hunting, because it privileges western elites in accessing Africa’s wildlife resources and has complex historical and postcolonial associations⁵². In particular, criticism has been directed at some African politicians for allowing an exploitative form of consumptive

tourism to occur, in order to satisfy their greed for money⁵². This sentiment is also echoed by some scholars who describe trophy hunting as an ongoing re-enactment of Western colonialism, representing oppression and social exclusion¹².

It has also been argued that non-consumptive, wildlife friendly tourism is more consistent with Ubuntu philosophy⁵², which is outlined as an objective for the conservation transformative interventions in the draft policy position. Ubuntu belief dictates the wellbeing of humanity and nature takes precedence, and while a tourist might have a permit to hunt an animal, it still violates the principles of Ubuntu if the community and the environment suffer as a result, and gives no excuse for gratuitous violence towards individual animals⁵².

In addition, there is continuing growth in tourists visiting natural areas and protected areas to see wild animals in their natural habitat^{38,53-56}, which indicates a global shift in demand for wildlife friendly tourism. Yet, in its current form, trophy hunting can threaten the development of wildlife friendly tourism. For example, studies have shown male lions living in protected reserves being drawn out into unprotected habitats, creating a “vacuum effect” where fewer males are left in protected areas for wildlife watching and photo tourism²⁸. Therefore, to help preserve the biodiversity in protected areas of South Africa, the abolishment of trophy hunting practices and a renewed focus on providing communities with similar or greater benefits has been recommended⁵².

The reputational and economic benefits of wildlife friendly tourism

Evidence suggests that the economic benefits gained from trophy hunting are not as significant to the South African economy as they are sometimes portrayed. For example, the value of trophy hunting to South Africa was estimated at US\$341 million for the 2015/16 season⁴¹. This estimate represents just 1.9% of the total tourism value to the country in 2019 (US\$22.1 billion)⁵⁷. Other reports⁵⁸ present a more conservative estimate of the economic benefits of South Africa’s trophy hunting industry, at less than US\$132 million per year. Furthermore, estimates of the job opportunities contributed by trophy hunting in South Africa range from around 7,500⁵⁸ to 17,000⁴¹, whereas non-consumptive biodiversity-related tourism supported at least 90,000 jobs in 2019⁴⁴. Other estimates suggest that trophy hunting revenue account for less than 0.78% of income and 0.76% of jobs generated by the tourism sector across South Africa⁷.

Some scholars⁵⁷ estimate that if the land currently utilised for consumptive trophy hunting in South Africa (around 21 million hectares) were reallocated towards non-consumptive tourism, this would create more than 190,000 jobs, which is over 11 times more than the 17,000 currently supported by trophy hunting⁴¹. The jobs created by non-consumptive tourism are also ecologically sustainable because they rely on preserving ecosystem health and wildlife longevity⁵⁷. Another study reported that the annual growth in tourist numbers over one year is about six times larger than the total annual economic value of all trophy hunting tourists in South Africa⁵⁸ and in 2018, photographic safari tourists outnumbered hunting tourists by 1,000:1⁵⁹. In addition, across nine sub-Saharan African countries including South Africa, a report found that trophy hunting accounts for only 0.004% of GDP on average⁶⁰. For lions specifically, hunting revenue is considered to be even less significant - just over 11 percent of direct hunting revenues were earned through lion hunts nationwide in 2013⁶¹.

Hunting tourism is a globally declining industry⁶² that is becoming less economically viable due to negative public perceptions, declining wildlife populations, trophy import bans^{63,64}, airline transportation bans of trophy shipments⁶⁵, and the wide range of ethical and ecological controversies featured in published studies in recent years^{2,12,37,52,66}.

Evidence shows that countries that continue to pursue trophy hunting risk being boycotted by tourists. For example, a recent poll found that 72% of international tourists would not wish to visit a country that has included trophy hunting as a key part of its economy⁶⁷. Furthermore, a report by the South African Hunters and Game Conservation Association⁶⁸ indicates a sharp decrease in international hunters visiting South Africa, with numbers down from 9,138 in 2011 to 6,539 in 2016. Another found that the number of foreign hunters visiting South Africa had decreased by 50% in just a few years prior to 2018⁶².

There are also concerns over the social inequalities resulting from trophy hunting in South Africa^{69,70}.

These factors also increase the risk of reputational damage for South Africa, should the trophy hunting industry continue. One study estimates that the potential net present value of the reputation damage being wrought on South Africa's tourism sector through the hunting industry (including canned hunting) is \$2.79 billion⁷¹, which vastly outweighs the estimated US\$341 million the sector contributes to the South African economy⁴¹. Furthermore, the money that is brought into the country through trophy hunting does not necessarily benefit low-income households and the communities that generate it, and rarely reaches conservation efforts⁷². One analysis from a team of economists found only 3% of hunting operators' revenues reaches communities living in hunting areas, while the majority goes to spin-off beneficiaries¹⁰⁴. Another study⁴¹ indicates that local communities only accrue an estimated 9% of the total income from trophy hunting, with the main beneficiaries being middle-income households and ranches. Furthermore, it is estimated that only 6% - 9% of revenue is allocated towards conservation⁵⁸.

How South Africa can become a global leader in wildlife tourism

Examples of income-generating wildlife friendly tourism attractions that could replace consumptive tourism such as trophy hunting include responsible photo tourism, trekking and wildlife watching safaris. Such attractions, when well-managed, enable wildlife encounters to occur with minimal impact on wildlife and encourage values such as stewardship, responsibility and trust in local communities³⁷. Non-consumptive wildlife friendly tourism is already a successful sector in its own right - the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) estimates that wildlife watching tours across Africa already constitute 88% of tour operators' annual revenue³⁷.

A potential challenge facing South Africa will be to generate incentives for landowners to conserve or restore wildlife on their land without the financial incentive that trophy hunting can bring; currently it has been reported that more land has been conserved under the hunting industry than under National Parks⁷³. However, this is not an insurmountable challenge. For example, in some countries where trophy hunting is already banned, such as Kenya (whose nature based tourism industry adds around US \$350 million to the national economy annually⁷⁴) land protection is encouraged via community-based natural resources management programs such as the Northern Rangelands Trust, which has been successful in alleviating poverty and strengthening conservation efforts in the region³⁷. Even if the intrinsic value of a wild animal is set aside, economic tools are increasingly demonstrating that wild animals are worth far more alive, both to the tourism industry and to ecosystems⁷⁵ and local communities living in close proximity to them.

Rejecting the necessity of trophy hunting as a conservation tool and pillar of South Africa's tourism industry could open up much-needed space for innovation and creativity¹², and provide opportunities for the development of a truly sustainable wildlife economy, increasing access and benefit sharing to rural communities and improving employment for women throughout the sector⁷⁶. These outcomes are fully aligned with the objectives described in

the draft policy position for the conservation and ecologically sustainable use of elephants, lions, leopard and rhinos in South Africa. Moreover, they adhere to the guidelines outlined in the Capetown Declaration on Responsible Tourism (International Conference on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, 2002). By recognising the 'real price' of natural resources, the best decisions for the long-term use of the environment can be reached³⁷.

For a post COVID-19 world, the concept of a 'New Deal' for wildlife in South Africa⁷⁷ provides an ideal opportunity to better safeguard ecosystems, wildlife and economic benefits from ecotourism in South Africa both now, and for future generations to come³⁸. Specifically, the development of wildlife-friendly tourism and the removal of the consumptive trophy hunting industry has the potential to aid the protection and enhancement of South Africa's international reputation as a global conservation leader, whilst simultaneously repositioning the country as an even more competitive destination of choice for responsible travelers and tour operators to do business with.

ENDS

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