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Endangered Wildlife Trust Perspective on Trophy Hunting

The Endangered Wildlife Trust's (EWT) mission is to conserve threatened species and ecosystems in southern Africa to the benefit of all people.

This position represents the EWT's view on the practice of trophy hunting. We accept that it is lawful to hunt various species of wildlife in South Africa and in principle the EWT supports the sustainable use of wildlife, which includes trophy hunting, provided it meets certain conditions.

Trophy hunting is practiced in South Africa and many other countries through Africa where we work. It can be defined as the practice of selectively hunting wildlife based on the size of an individual or its physical attributes, such as horn size. By definition, trophy hunting rewards the hunter primarily with a physical trophy or photographs, and the experience of the hunt (here we do not consider so-called biltong or meat hunting). The practice is usually applied to large mammal and fish species. The EWT acknowledges the substantial financial contribution that the hunting industry makes to the South African economy.

The EWT is therefore not opposed in principle to the act of trophy hunting, but believes strongly that trophy hunting must meet certain criteria:

- Trophy hunting must, first and foremost, result in **clear** and **measurable** positive benefits for the conservation of biodiversity; and
- Trophy hunting must adopt clear, **ethical standards** and abide by all relevant local, national and international legislation. It should follow the principles of **fair chase** and support the ability of an animal to escape from the hunter.

In addition we strongly believe that trophy hunting operators should make a meaningful contribution to society, particularly amongst local communities in the vicinity of hunting areas. It is apparent, however, that not all trophy hunting operations do make a measureable, ethically acceptable and positive contribution to conservation and society. This situation is compounded by a lack of transparency throughout the industry. Indeed the EWT is acutely aware that, at present, there are many gaps in our understanding of the contributions that trophy hunting makes.

These shortcomings can only be overcome using science-based instruments that demonstrate the positive impacts that trophy hunting may have for species, ecosystems and society whilst being undertaken in full compliance with all national and provincial regulations that underpin and regulate trophy hunting practices. In conclusion, while the EWT fully supports the sustainable use of wildlife – indeed it is a constitutional right in South Africa – we strongly urge all parties involved in trophy hunting to operate within conservation, societal and ethical best practice.



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION TO SUPPORT OUR POSITION

Here we outline some of the positive and negative arguments that underlie the practice of trophy hunting, and its alleged benefits for wildlife and society, that need rigorous examination:

1. **Conservation.** The positive aspects of trophy hunting for conservation (although many of these statements lack rigorous, scientific support) are considered to include:
 - a. Land use supporting wildlife: A key contribution that trophy hunting makes to conservation is through the expansion of areas that would otherwise not be set aside for wildlife. Particularly outside of South Africa, the land set aside for trophy hunting contributes significantly to land use with a potential net positive benefit for biodiversity. With reduced trophy hunting less land will potentially be managed primarily for wildlife protection, with possible negative impacts for conservation and a potential increase in poaching and human wildlife conflict.
 - b. Limited wildlife offtake: By its very nature, low off-take is needed to ensure the high quality of trophy individuals. The limited number of animals killed will have negligible impacts on population numbers, as long as quotas are set and followed correctly.
 - c. Rehabilitation of degraded lands: Trophy hunting can play an important role in supporting the rehabilitation of degraded land when such areas can provide income generation from wildlife, such as in Mozambique's Coutada hunting blocks.
 - d. Recovery of threatened species: On private land in South Africa at least, trophy hunting has historically helped promote the recovery of several threatened species including the Bontebok, Black Wildebeest, Cape Mountain Zebra and White Rhino by encouraging their reintroduction onto wildlife ranches.

However, by its very nature, trophy hunting selects species and for certain individuals within a population. Individuals may, for instance, have the longest horns, biggest mane or largest tusks. Immediately, this raises questions about the sustainability of the practice for which there are few scientifically credible answers:

- a. Selective removal: Trophy hunting by its very nature removes larger individuals, many of which may be prime breeders, or otherwise still play an active breeding role in the population. These individuals would, naturally, be expected to make a disproportionately large contribution towards breeding. Only older individuals of some species that are passed their breeding prime present legitimate trophy hunting targets, but identifying these individuals is difficult without an intimate knowledge of their life histories, while others may in fact not be considered the best trophies and are avoided.
- b. Population demography: There is an absence of reliable data on which to base trophy hunting quotas for some species. This leads to very real concerns about the potential



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negative and unsustainable impact that trophy hunting can have on populations (e.g. leopards, lions). This is particularly relevant in areas where conflict between wildlife and people leads to increased removal of so-called 'problem animals', for which the combined impacts of both trophy hunting and the removal of 'problem animals' are not taken into account when considering their impacts on a species or population.

- c. Ripple effect: Trophy hunting can disrupt the wider, social population structure of a species, even impacting on protected areas where hunting may be forbidden. This occurs when individuals either wander naturally into hunting areas, or are drawn unethically out of non-hunting areas by practices such as baiting and calling. The social instability this causes leads to unforeseen mortalities brought on, for instance, by territorial disputes as new territory holders and borders need to be established and infanticide as new territory holders kill the cubs of other males in order to breed themselves.
 - d. Ecological degradation: The high densities of wildlife on some wildlife ranches, coupled with an inability for them to roam beyond the ranches' borders, can easily result in ecological degradation.
 - e. Extra-limitals: In the bigger picture, the EWT realises that the hunting of extra-limital and exotic species, at its best, may have no measurable negative impact on biodiversity. However, at its worst, extra-limitals have serious negative impacts on biodiversity (for example the introduction of exotic fish into rivers that can lead to the extirpation of indigenous fish). The practice also negates any so-called conservation advantages of hunting indigenous wildlife, if exotics have been imported into an area where they never naturally occurred.
 - f. Species persecution: The trophy hunting industry requires that wildlife meet hunters' demands and can, for instance, exacerbate conflict with threatened carnivores. So for antelope such as Roan and Sable that have a high trophy value, predation is an obvious risk that can see to the persecution of large, apex predators like Cheetahs and African Wild Dogs which may prey on them.
 - g. Fencing in of trophy animals: To ensure that trophy animals are not lost from their property, ranchers often fence their wildlife in. Reducing fencing, for instance through the formation of wildlife conservancies, is valuable to wildlife conservation as it allows animals (including non-target species such as pangolins, small antelope and tortoises), to roam over larger areas and mix with neighbouring populations. This is beneficial as it reduces the local impact on vegetation, allows animals to respond in drought situations when food is scarce and reduces the chances of inbreeding.
2. **Society**. Trophy hunting provides an opportunity to make several important contributions to society, particularly amongst local communities in the vicinity of hunting areas. These may include:



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- a. Food security: As hunts are by definition for trophy purposes, this leaves the meat available for local consumption. Whilst the meat of carnivores is not generally consumed, herbivores and in particular elephants, can provide a valuable source of meat to local communities.
- b. Job creation: The hunting industry creates jobs for local community members, for instance as trackers, skimmers and through infrastructure development and maintenance. It also provides an opportunity for the upskilling of employees.
- c. Community development: Proceeds from trophy hunting can be fed back into community development through the provision of amenities like schools and clinics.
- d. Potential direct benefit to the local communities: Namibia at least provides a good example where communities benefit directly through the ownership of conservancies as the income from trophy hunting feeds back both to community-wide projects like schools and clinics and to individual households as well.

On the other hand, the EWT recognises that trophy hunting is often not as beneficial to society as it could be. While these issues are by no means limited to the trophy hunting industry, more empirical information is needed to investigate the following:

- a. Limited impact on job creation: While some jobs are created within the trophy hunting industry, employment opportunities remain limited and the contribution of trophy hunting to job creation is often overstated – these are also often not skilled jobs, are not regulated and do not offer career paths/skills development.
 - b. Limited benefits to local communities: In South Africa at least, not many local communities can claim to benefit from trophy hunting on private ranches, as little of the profits generated from hunts are fed back into these communities. Besides issues around community benefits, land ownership targets are not being adequately addressed through the current system. Key issues include inadequate legislation to enforce community involvement as well as limited business knowledge within communities to negotiate terms with private operators and run hunting operations.
 - c. Exploitation of workers: Not all trophy hunting operations provide their workers with even the basic working conditions as required under South African law.
3. **Economics**. The hunting industry maintains that it contributes about six billion rand (approximately six hundred million American dollars) to the South African economy annually, of which about ten per cent is derived directly from trophy hunting. The following are often considered positive economic attributes of trophy hunting:
- a. The average trophy hunter brings in more money to the economy than the average ecotourist¹.
 - b. Trophy hunting can make a significant contribution to a country's GDP – for instance in Namibia and Zimbabwe.

¹ Baker, J.E., 1997. Trophy hunting as a sustainable use of wildlife resources in southern and eastern Africa. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*



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- c. Trophy hunting diversifies the money generated through the conservation/wildlife basket, by providing for more income opportunities.
- d. In some areas ecotourism is simply not possible, while trophy hunting is. Aesthetic appeal – beautiful vistas and pristine landscape – are not normally persuasive factors in choosing hunting venues, as hunters are more interested in the wildlife that they have come to hunt. These different forms of land use do not always compete with each other for land, adding cumulatively to the conservation/wildlife basket. Compared with ecotourists, the average trophy hunter is willing to travel further, put up with more basic accommodation, and is less demanding with regards to the level of biodiversity needed for game viewing (as long as the desired species for hunting are present).

Despite the positive economic benefits of trophy hunting, there are a number of concerns related to the distribution of money that must be addressed:

- a. In some instances quite significant monies stay overseas with expo/marketers and do not feed through to the country in which an animal is trophy-hunted (and the same can be said of the ecotourism industry).
 - b. The majority of income often sits with the professional hunter, with relatively little cascading through into the community.
 - c. Not all the money earmarked for a community is distributed equitably amongst that community (though this problem relates also to governments when they fail to fulfil their obligations).
 - d. While trophy hunters invest money into conservation, this is almost exclusively limited to conserving the species that they want to hunt (e.g. limited, if any, funding is made available for the conservation of frogs, snakes etc.), meaning that any further conservation gains are by default rather than design.
4. **Ethics.** The EWT advocates the principles of fair chase and the ability of an animal to escape from the hunter. In this and the wider ethical context we highlight several ethical concerns with trophy hunting:
- a. It should not be a foregone conclusion that a hunter will return home with a trophy, as the industry is prone to suggesting in adverts or in marketing materials, which undermine the essence of fair chase and the hunt.
 - b. The practice of limiting the trophy animal's movements to a confined, fenced area during the hunt (the practice of "canned hunting") provides the animal with no chance to escape.
 - c. With desirable traits such as large horns, prices for such individuals are inflated. While this might have a positive economic impact for the breeder, it has led to the selective breeding of individuals with such traits skewing the genetics of the population.
 - d. Similarly, there is a high demand for wildlife with unusual colour variations such as "black impala," "white springbok" and "golden wildebeest". Given the high prices live animals command, hunting them has not yet mainstreamed them into the trophy industry. Even so, selective breeding is skewing the genetics of these individuals, and presumably the



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populations to which they belong. Besides these obvious risks, there is no direct conservation value to selectively breeding animals for their collector or novelty value.

- e. The rarer a species is, the more likely it is that someone will want to hunt it, and the higher prices an individual animal can command. The link between rarity and the desire to kill an animal raises questions the conservation ethics of some trophy hunters and operators as it is difficult to understand how an increased desire to hunt more threatened species can benefit their conservation.
- f. Certain trophy hunting practices – such as the baiting of leopards, the use of spotlights or “put and take” hunting (the captive breeding of wildlife to be released into the wild, or a fenced enclosure, for the sole purpose of trophy-hunting a few hours/days later) – are grossly unethical.

5. Best Practice. While trophy hunting potentially represents a sustainable form of wildlife utilisation, the conservation opportunities this sport provides are not being met. Significant effort needs to be put into improving the transparency of the industry and ensuring that best practice controls the whole value chain.

- a. There is a paucity of best practice policies in place for trophy hunting that have a regional context and address issues associated with specific threatened species.
- b. Best practice policies do not presently apply across all aspects of trophy hunting, including hunting, monitoring, quota setting, expenditure and accreditation standards for professional hunters.
- c. The setting of hunting quotas is mostly not based on the rigorous census of wildlife populations or a sound scientific understanding of a species’ population demographics – guesswork is used in many instances.
- d. With limited resources available to police the trophy hunting industry, the system can be abused by operators who overstep their quotas – for instance when they are only provided with a short-term lease on the land, in which case there are limited incentives to protect the wildlife there beyond the period of their lease.
- e. The system is also abused by criminal syndicates, through loopholes in present legislation, that have allowed them to export “trophies” such as rhino horns to fuel the illegal wildlife trade.

The EWT bases its perspectives on the best available information and data available at the time. Our positions and opinions may change as more information and data become available.