



Honourable Minister Barbara Creecy

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WAPFSA REQUEST TO MINISTER BARBARA CREECY RE CHEETAHS

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) issued a [public statement](#) about twelve wild cheetahs (*Cheetah, Acinonyx jubatus*) exported from South Africa to India on Friday 17th of February 2023.

Cheetahs are considered to be vulnerable in the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List of Threatened Species and it is listed under Appendix I (Species threatened with extinction) under the Convention of International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

On the 26th of January 2023 South Africa and the Republic of India signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) on cooperation in the Re-Introduction of the Cheetah to India, where it is an exotic species. In terms of the agreement after the first twelve cheetahs were exported in February a further twelve cheetahs will be exported annually for ten years.

This international programme is being coordinated by DFFE, the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) SANBI, South African National Parks (SANParks) the Cheetah Metapopulation Initiative, the Faculty of Veterinary Science of the University of Pretoria, the Endangered Wildlife Trust with the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change of India, the High Commission of India, National Tiger Conservation Authority and Wildlife Institute of India and Madya Pradesh Forest Department.

Minister Barbara Creecy said: “It is because of South Africa’s successful conservation practices that our country is able to participate in a project such as this – to restore a species in a former range state and thus contribute to the future survival of the species.”

The EMS Foundation, a member of WAPFSA, raised several [serious concerns](#) with regard to the aforementioned project via their lawyers with Minister Barbara Creecy on the 16th of February 2023.

The concerns include the fact that the aforementioned project might have been launched using an outdated and unpublished non-detriment finding (NDF) and or that the scientific information based upon which decisions were made is not robust. The EMS Foundation requested a precautionary approach to be adopted and that the project be halted until South African citizens have been allowed to comment and more robust peer-reviewed scientific information has been published.

To our understanding, the project has not been assessed independently and the only input since 2015 was authored almost exclusively by a single scientist, Vincent van der Merwe, who is a former employee of the Endangered Wildlife Trust and the coordinator of the cheetah metapopulation project.

WAPFSA members are concerned that South Africa might be repeating mistakes of the past. In 2014 the Head of Veterinary Wildlife Services at [SANParks](#) said, that the Kruger National Park was swapping one biological asset for another when the Kruger National Park sold 260 rhinos to three hunting safari companies for safekeeping. According to the SANParks at the time there was a “high population density and male rhinos sometimes injure or kill each other”. Unfortunately, the [Kruger National Park 2022 Annual General Report](#) confirms that since 2009 rhino numbers have dropped from 11420 to 2458.

Whilst the South African / India Cheetah project presently involves the export of privately owned cheetahs from their natural range states to India, we are cognizant that free-roaming cheetahs, who are a public asset, have been for years captured and relocated under a permit, to privately owned reserves. If then, there is an issue of capacity in private reserves, we question why some cheetahs cannot be relocated to our National Parks, rather than to ex-range locations.

Indian wildlife biologist and conservation scientist Ravi Chellam has said that India does [not have the habitat](#) or prey species for wild, free-roaming cheetahs, the project will not fulfil its aim of grassland conservation and that conserving other threatened species such as caraculs and the Great Indian Bustard, should be the priority. Valmik Thapar a senior conservationist is unsure whether the cheetahs will survive in the wild in India. “The authorities have no experience or understanding of cheetahs in the wild. African cheetahs, if released into Kuno will survive only in the short term. India was never the natural home of African cheetahs.”

Finally, WAPFSA Members raise serious welfare concerns for the twelve cheetahs who were captured from the wild and were then kept in captivity for six months, could not hunt during that period and were fed by the management. In an [interview](#) with Daily Maverick, Vincent Van der Merwe voiced frustration that the twelve animals had steadily lost the necessary fitness and health over the last six months because they had been confined in quarantine bomas. According to [media reports](#), Van der Merwe also said the team had to swap some of the cheetahs with newly captured ones before the shipment took place.

Members of WAPFSA are concerned that those wild-captured cheetahs who were unfit, were then moved to permanent captivity.

Considering all the above, the undersigning Members of WAPFSA urge the Honourable Minister Barbara Creecy to:

1. Halt any further capture for export until she publishes for public comments an updated NDF supporting, with credible data, that similar exports will not be detrimental to the survival of the Species in South Africa. Such NDF will have to follow a public process before being finalised and gazetted as per NEM:BA.
2. Issue a public statement on the fate of the unfit cheetahs who were swapped and left behind.
3. Provide clarity on the positive conservation outcomes for South Africa from this project.
4. Commit to reporting on the survival rate of the exported cheetahs, on an ongoing basis.

Kind regards,



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ON BEHALF OF WAPFSA

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Ban Animal Trading	Director	Smaragda Louw
Beauty Without Cruelty (South Africa)	Chairperson	Toni Brockhoven
Betty's Bay Baboon Action Group	Co-Founders	Renee Bish and Peter Oxford

Centre for Animal Rehabilitation and Education	Director	Stephen Munro
EMS Foundation	Director	Michele Pickover
Four Paws (SA)	Director	Fiona Miles
Future 4 Wildlife	Co-Founder	Stefania Falcon
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Global White Lion Protection Trust	CEO Founder	Linda Tucker y
Institute for Critical Animal Studies (Africa)	Director	Les Mitchell
Monkey Helpline	Co-Founder	Steve Smit
Panthera Africa Big Cat Sanctuary	Co-Founders	Liz Cornwall and Catherine Nyquist
Parliament for the People	Founder	Vivien Law
Rhinos in Africa	Founder	Megan Carr
South Peninsula Khoi Council	Senior Chief	Stephen Fritz
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