

Dear HAWASA Representatives

Herewith my summary of the Minister meeting held on 26 March. With special thanks to Adri, whose notes I have copied much from here, and Dries who has also scrutinised and contributed.

Opening

The meeting was attended by Adri, Dries and myself for HAWASA. Minister Barbra Creecy and DDG for Biodiversity & Conservation, Shonisani Munzhedzi for the department. The scheduled time was one hour.

The Minister welcomed us and thanked us for suggesting the meeting, also noting her appreciation for not “rushing” her too soon into the start of her appointment. She recognises the importance of the sector and hopes that the Biodiversity Phakisa will get up and running. The other two Phakisas within the department are Oceans/Coast and Waste. Her summary suggested that in the other two there had been less than ideal participation/enthusiasm from the private sector. My thoughts are that this is an area that wildlife could be noticeably better at.

She indicated that she would be keen to have more discussions on possible ways to institute support for private development, in order to support the sector and mentioned that the Department is strong on the conservation side, but not necessarily so strong on the economic side and therefore a working partnership with the private sector is very important. She then invited us to take up the conversation.

I lead the discussion following the agenda as earlier proposed as best we could. We added that some discussion should be included on the Covid19 issue and the looming lockdown in particular. I gave an overview regarding the complete package within the wider wildlife sector which the eight HAWASA members cover, and that by engaging with HAWASA she had a direct portal into the entire sector down to grassroots members and participants. I indicated our diversity and touched on the fact that there would always remain some specifics where disparity existed between our various philosophies, and that we strived to manage these responsibly and in-house.

I dealt in very broad strokes on some of the more common, or long-standing constraints and frustrations. Matters remaining long on the Wildlife Forum, without any traction, and also the fact that what is a known national aspiration within the BES/Lab strategy getting lost or twisted at the provincial level in many instances. I also touched on frustrations in transformation issues where government promises do not come through and that leaves us in compromised positions with expectant beneficiaries. I mentioned specific examples that are within my own sphere of knowledge wherever I could.

Adri complemented this discussion with further examples, and some possible solutions, such as funding through Land Bank in tripartite partnerships. Dries emphasised the disconnect between the department of tourism who are not embracing hunting tourism while DEFF have it as a major strategic cause.

Minister indicated that on the “9+1” issue a review of the national/provincial relationship was identified during the MEC’s workstream discussions the week before, and how they could rationalise the resources they have available.

Core Conversation

She then went on to the dept of tourism issue to raise the lion issue referring to “canned lions and lion bone” issue. She put it that the level of barrage regarding the lion industry (captive, canned,

petting, bone trade, etc.) is deafening and that the wildlife industry would live in a dreamworld if they think they could carry on as is with that specific sector, without damage to the rest of the wildlife industry. It was up to the whole sector to find the right path for this.

She likened it to the fossil fuel sector which is facing major challenges of acceptability leading to funding and other constraints globally. She put it that regardless of SA having 300 years of coal reserves and needing energy, the challenges against coal-fired power stations demands that alternatives are found instead. She strongly suggested that as “homework” HAWASA should have proper discussions on the lion issue between ourselves.

I asked here whether she believed that this should be towards ultimately ending the breeding of lions altogether or whether it was more a question of finding ways to raise the level of practice to more acceptable norms and standards. She would not commit a direct answer to this, reiterating that it is a problem and its vested with us. She did emphasise that an outcome that caused hardship or losses for the most vulnerable would not work. She indicated that this would include smaller operators for whom the lion breeding was the significant or only business or employment.

I did not wish to go into detail on a sub-sector specific conversation, so tried to steer away from further interrogating this specific subject. I did caution that species specific, draconian legislation would undoubtedly either prove invalid on legal review, or alternatively could have far-reaching negative consequences across a lot of other essential wildlife practices. I sense she fully appreciates this risk already. The bottom line however, is that she hopes that we could find an industry driven consensus to holistically manage the captive bred lion matter. I also sense that if we did come up with something creative and with broad support amongst us, she would support the implementation thereof.

Transformation

On Transformation Adri mentioned that most transformation projects in the wildlife industry, is based on PPP's, but expressed concern about the long-outstanding EPIP funding to be paid over to emerging game farmers. As stated earlier the Landbank indicated interest in entering into a tri-partite agreement, to enable recipients to leverage further funding from the Landbank.

Minister mentioned that the funding has been delayed because of the strict model of the open procurement process as needed by the Auditor-General, but that they are trying to find solutions. The process is complicated and adds costs. This will remain difficult however and if external funding partners were involved this could be better. DDG Shonisani proposed to bring HAWASA members in to discussions with the Department of Small Business to discuss possibilities

Animal Rightism & the NSPCA in the WF

DDG Shonisani indicated his concern regarding our reaction to the NSPCA inclusion at the WF. Minister indicated her belief that NSPCA are a genuine animal welfare body and that we should welcome them as against animal rightists. Her discussions lead me to believe that although she may not have picked up on the animal rights influence within NSPCA specifically, she certainly does see and understand the difference between welfare bodies and rightists in this regard.

The Minister emphasized the importance to have facts available about the wildlife industry's contribution to biodiversity where private land can be acknowledged as mini eco-systems. Adri informed the minister of the proposed certification scheme, as an industry-driven scheme which

should incentivise land owners. Minister also touched on the importance to involve the younger generation, and introducing them to good practices.

COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

- a. The Minister requested the industry to, during this time of lockdown and as homework ☺, start developing ideas and policies, eg:
 - i. Determine why the existing model doesn't work;
 - ii. Isolate key stumbling blocks;
 - iii. Determine the economic opportunities in the value chain
Consider capitalisation options, eg .Landbank, SIFA, etc.
 - iv. Consider government can facilitate the private sector to "run themselves".

- b. Min Creecy emphasized that the purpose of lockdown is to save lives by cutting down on human contact. She appealed that although there are certain exemptions for important sectors such as food production and wildlife management, we should all realise that it is not business as usual and that common sense should prevail. Eg. when considering moving animals, also consider the effect that delays at road blockages will have on the animals, etc. Therefore, she requested a cut-down on movement to ensure the welfare of the animals and workers.

Closing

I broached the possibility of a more broad and inclusive meeting post the lockdown with the full HAWASA membership, and that the limit of three was to manage the introduction. This has also worked much better with the Covid19 risk. Minister indicated that she would certainly like to meet with all representatives of HAWASA at a next meeting, and had anticipated this being the case even for this first one although also noting that the covid19 issue would have made that problematic.

She emphasised that she looks forward to good relationships and partnerships with the wildlife sector. She is solutions and results driven. My sense is that we have a very pragmatic and astute Minister in this sector now. Perhaps she does not quite yet have the absolute conviction in favour of hunting as the basis for sustainable use that Minister Molewa had, but I do believe that if we are honest and effective partners, she will allow us the space to demonstrate our worth. The meeting was very cordial and comfortable with the Minister allowing us ample time even though she and cabinet had had an incredibly hard and busy week. In fact, the meeting scheduled for 1 hour, eventually lasted 2 hours and 20 minutes. I believe that we also left her much more comfortable with who her stakeholders are in the wildlife sector.

Stephen Palos
HAWASA Chair
6 April 2020

