

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice
Environment and Energy portfolio

Question No: 65
Hearing: Supplementary Budget Estimates
Outcome: Outcome 1
Program: Wildlife Heritage and Marine Division (WHM)
Topic: Canned lion cub imports – Billabong Zoo
Hansard Page: n/a
Question Date: 31 October 2016
Question Type: Written

Senator Rhiannon, Lee asked:

The Australian government recently banned the importation of lion trophies and body parts as a direct response to South Africa's canned hunting industry.

Despite this, a privately owned NSW zoo, Billabong Zoo, has been allowed to import lion cubs sourced from Ukutula South Africa, a breeder exposed in the documentary Blood Lions as being part of the supply chain in the canned hunting industry, with the Deputy Prime Minister celebrating the importation of these animals:

- a) Why were permits issued for these cubs given that Australia considers lions as Appendix 1 and are well informed about captive breeding in South Africa?
- b) Why has the government supported the canned hunting supply chain by allowing the importation of animals from a canned lion hunting breeder?
- c) How does the government reconcile rightly condemning South Africa's predator farms and the cycle of exploitation, yet support the same businesses by allowing importation of cubs from these same operators?
- d) It has been suggested the cubs are inbred, what has the Department done to check the genetic or physical health of these animals prior to permitting their importation?
- e) Why are private zoos/theme parks allowed to import Appendix 1 species?
- f) What parameters are considered with regards to usual habitat and climate conditions – for example the Billabong Zoo is based in Port Macquarie but has a snow leopard which lives in cold climates?
- g) What lion ecologist is working with this zoo?
- h) What benefit is to be gained with breeding lions - what conservation value?
- i) Is there genetic proof that these cubs aren't siblings?
- j) Who, other than the owners, monitors and regulates the ongoing welfare of these animals?
- k) Can the Department advise how many predators are in zoos and theme parks in Australia?
- l) Both Stardust Circus and ZooDoo have bred lions saying it has occurred by 'accident'. When zoos or circuses breed by "accident," what penalties or actions are taken by authorities?

Answer:

a) The permit to import lion cubs to Billabong Zoo was issued as the application met the criteria outlined in the EPBC Act, including that the cubs were for the purpose of non-commercial conservation breeding, were part of a cooperative conservation program

administered by the Zoo and Aquarium Association of Australasia (ZAA) and the welfare requirements for transport and destination facilities were met.

b) and c) The Australian Government put in place a stricter domestic measure for lions due to concerns over canned hunting. The stricter measure does not regulate captive breeding or breeders.

The EPBC Act requires that the lions come from a legal source. The Department confirmed that Ukutula Conservation Centre was a registered captive breeder. The ZAA have the responsibility to approve the pedigree of each lion introduced to the cooperative conservation program.

d) As lions are part of a ZAA cooperative conservation program, the Department sought support from the ZAA prior to issuing the import permit. The ZAA have the responsibility to approve the pedigree of each lion introduced to the cooperative conservation program. A letter of support was received from the ZAA.

e) Any zoo or wildlife park participating in a cooperative conservation program can potentially import animals for non-commercial conservation breeding.

f) The Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Regulations include welfare requirements for live mammals. The facility receiving the animal must be suitably equipped to manage, confine and care for the animal, including meeting the behavioural and biological needs of the animal. An assessment is conducted by the Department on the facility, including planned animal accommodation, care and diet, and experience of relevant staff. This includes consideration of provisions for heating and cooling in the particular animal's accommodation.

g) The Department is not aware whether a lion ecologist works with Billabong Zoo.

h) The lions in question were imported into a cooperative conservation program. A cooperative conservation program is a breeding and/or management program that aims to conserve a species (in the wild or in captivity, or both) and applies best practice to the management of husbandry, genetics, biology and behavioural needs of the species. The program's objectives must be based on the conservation status and needs of the species, and the program must not be detrimental to the survival of the species in the wild.

i) The ZAA have the responsibility to approve the pedigree of each lion introduced to the cooperative conservation program, which is judged by examining the records of breeding.

j) The NSW State government has ongoing primary responsibility for animal welfare in zoos.

k) No. The Department does not maintain records of the number of animals in zoos and theme parks.

l) The Department does not usually seek to restrict the breeding of imported zoo animals, especially if they are part of a cooperative conservation program.