

# **Lion breeding industry remains ‘unchanged’ despite government promises — NSPCA**

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Lion with inadequate vet care. Picture: NSPCA

The National Council of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSPCA) has warned that little to no progress has been made in shutting down South Africa’s captive lion breeding industry, despite a series of government commitments and legal recommendations.

During a briefing to the portfolio committee on environment, forestry and fisheries on Tuesday, National Chief Inspector Douglas Wolhuter said that “nothing has changed” — highlighting ongoing welfare violations and a continued lack of enforcement, despite a government-backed plan to phase out lion farming.

## **Lack of action despite recommendations**

In 2020, a High-Level Panel (HLP) recommended a full audit of lion farms, a moratorium on breeding, and the elimination of lion bone stockpiles.

These proposals were adopted in April 2024 through the Ministerial Task Team (MTT) report.

However, the NSPCA says none of these have been fully implemented.

“[There has been] no full and extensive audit of the industry, no moratorium on breeding, and lion bone stockpiles still exist,” the presentation read.

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## **Disturbing welfare conditions persist**

According to the NSPCA, its inspectors continue to encounter widespread contraventions of the Animals Protection Act 71 of 1962.

These include lack of potable water, inadequate shelter, insufficient veterinary care, poor hygiene, and evidence of neglect.

“Any person who unnecessarily starves or under-feeds or denies water or food to any animal is in violation,” the NSPCA reminded parliament, citing section 2 (1)(c) of the Act.

One example included lion cubs discarded in rubbish dumps, with undeclared carcasses and bones also recovered.

“How were the lions treated when alive, and how did they die?” the NSPCA asked.

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## **Courts affirm mandate**

While court rulings have affirmed the NSPCA’s mandate—declaring animal welfare and conservation as “intertwined values”—the organisation expressed frustration with ongoing delays.

“The justice process is too slow, and penalties remain insufficient,” the presentation said.

In one recent case, a guilty party received a suspended 12-month sentence or a R4 000 fine.

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## **A call for meaningful collaboration**

The NSPCA has called on the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) to provide project-specific funding to allow for joint inspections and audits.

“The NSPCA is willing to work in Joint Operations with the DFFE and EMIs to effect coordinated inspections [...] and the information sharing must be a two-way street for effective compliance”

Wolhuter warned against replacing lions with other exotic species, such as tigers.

“South Africa cannot allow tigers to replace lions, as welfare still applies,” he stated.

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