

NSPCA advocates for specialised courts to expedite wildlife cases



The National Council of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSPCA) called for the removal of legislative red tape and an improvement in the judicial system when it came to captive animals.

Image: FILE

The National Council of Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (NSPCA) called for the removal of legislative red tape and an improvement in the judicial system when it came to captive animals.

The NSPCA made a clarion call for specialised courts to handle wildlife cases and also to expedite cases in the judicial system, during a presentation to the Portfolio Committee on Forestry, Fisheries and Environment on Tuesday.

Douglas Wolhuter, the National Chief Inspector and Manager NSPCA Wildlife Protection Unit said that in 2023 they advocated for no permits to be issued to new facilities, for a full audit of the lion farming industry, a moratorium on breeding and putting an end to lion bone stockpiles.

He said that some of the challenges faced are a slow justice system and poor penalties for transgressors and that were many obstacles that they faced between January 2023 and June 2025.

Wolhuter pointed out court prosecutions where the accused were found guilty and sentenced to a R4,000 fine or 12 months imprisonment, wholly suspended for 5 years, while another accused was sentenced to R5,000 fine or 10 months imprisonment, half of which is suspended for 5 years.

He said that during inspections they found an opium factory, lion cubs discarded in rubbish dumps, illegally kept shark fins and unpermitted lion meat, high schedule drugs kept in the open and without a veterinarian on-site

The NSPCA is willing to partake in a co-ordinated inspection with the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) to carry out the required audits of the facilities.

Wolhuter said the NSPCA already shares information with the compliance and enforcement department of the DFFE, and the information sharing must be a two-way street for effective compliance.

“None of us can afford to allow the slow pace of getting the job at hand done,” Wolhuter said.

The NSPCA inspection statistics:

- 133 predator facility inspections in 2022
- 64 Warnings issued
- 10 Animal Welfare Notices issued
- 75 captive lion facilities inspected in 2022. Some facilities have had multiple inspections due to non-compliance.
- 21 Warrants granted and enforced in 2022 only.
- 49 Warnings issued
- 6 Notices issued
- 23 lions euthanised
- 4 Dockets Registered
- 7 Dockets in total for lion farming
- 1 Case in trial
- 176 captive lion facilities inspected in 2 years

The NSPCA was also concerned about snaring, which caused distress and suffering. Acting chairperson of the committee Ronalda Nalumango said the committee must ensure continuous progress especially in addressing the gaps identified by the high-level experts. She said the DFFE will hold a meeting later this month with the Department of Agriculture where they will reflect on the recommendations by the NSPCA.

“They pin-pointed areas where the legislature needed to improve and refine practices between the department and we recognise the challenges in prosecuting individuals,” she said.

Dr Lilian Managa, MP and committee member, said government must confront this issue head on and engage meaningfully and why the existing legislation meant to protect these animals, are not being implemented.

Andrew Dirk de Blocq van Scheltinga, MP and committee member, said this has a negative contribution to South Africa's reputation internationally in terms of tourism and unhealthy hunting practices.

"There are moral and judiciary reasons to follow through on the recommendations by the task team and panel. The fines are a slap on the wrist and we need to relook at the Animal Protection Act," he said.

zainul.dawood@inl.co.za