South Africa: Mpumalanga Moves to Shut Down Captive Lion Breeding

Just as many expected a retreat from wildlife reform, Mpumalanga has taken the opposite step - moving to shut down captive lion breeding and jolting an industry that believed the political winds were turning in its favour.

In a move that has surprised many observers of South Africa's wildlife politics, the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA) has announced that it is phasing out captive lion facilities in the province - importantly aligning itself squarely with national plans that have been rolling forward in fits and starts since 2018.

In a media release issued on 24 February 2026, the agency confirmed it "fully supports the national initiatives approved by [the] Cabinet of South Africa in April 2024" aimed at the "responsible, lawful, and humane closure of the captive lion industry."

The statement makes it clear that no new captive lion facilities will be permitted, captive breeding of lions will not be allowed and the importation of captive lions from other provinces will be phased out.

A sterilisation programme is to be implemented as part of a voluntary exit strategy outlined by a Ministerial Task Team.

For a province that markets itself as a premier wildlife destination - home to parts of the Kruger National Park and major private reserves - the announcement marks a decisive policy shift.

A national trajectory

Mpumalanga's position follows a unanimous decision in the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) last week to <a...