



Open Letter To:

Minister Martinus Van Schalkwyk
Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism
South Africa

19 November 2007

POLICY FORMULATION: THE CAPTURE AND TRAINING OF WILD ELEPHANTS

Honourable Minister,

I have studied elephants for over 30 years and I am Research Director of the Amboseli Trust for Elephants, the longest study of elephants in the world. I attended the meeting held by the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) on 8th November, as an invited elephant expert, to express my views against the capture and training of elephants. I attach the statement I gave at the meeting for your information. As you are aware, the meeting which took place on 12th November appeared to ignore the body of scientific data which argues for an end to these practices. I wish to comment only briefly on the direction that DEAT appears to be taking.

Over the last two years South Africa and your Ministry, in particular, have engaged in a very open process to develop new norms and standards for the management of elephants in South Africa. This development has focussed principally on issues surrounding the culling of elephants; the Amboseli Trust for Elephants has participated in these consultations. South Africa is to be commended for this very open course of action.

With the spotlight focused on the ethics of culling, however, people have overlooked an appalling practice that South Africa is engaged in: The capture of elephants from the wild, the separation of these individuals from their families, and their subsequent taming and training for use in elephant back safaris and circuses.

With all due respect, I believe that DEAT may not have full insight into the magnitude of the consequences of its current plan to allow these practices to continue. The situation is already making headlines around the world. I believe that

allowing the continued capture and training of wild elephants could threaten South Africa's image and, therefore, its lucrative tourism industry.

The wholesale slaughter of elephants creates horrific images. Do not underestimate, however, the impact on world opinion of the equally hideous sounds and imagery of elephant calves and juveniles being forcibly separated from their families, captured and then undergoing inhumane taming and training methods, and a lifetime of captivity. For an enlightened public, this practice is totally unacceptable because it is purely for human entertainment and, therefore, the cruelty it causes is unnecessary.

At this stage, the closing down of captive elephant operations represents a small economic loss, relative to the loss of closing down a larger industry later, relative to the potential impact of negative press on tourism, relative to the enormous management and other problems that captive elephants will undoubtedly engender down the road, and relative to the moral dilemma of allowing these practices to continue.

Quoting from my statement I specifically I argue that:

1. Based on the scientific evidence the capture and removal of wild calves from their families is inhumane and should be outlawed.
2. South Africa should, therefore, neither import nor export captured elephants destined for captivity.
3. In my opinion, the argument that capture is less abhorrent than culling is not true.
4. All chains, ankuses, hydraulic winches and cables and other instruments used to control elephants represent abuse and should be outlawed.
5. Businesses or organisations that exploit animals for commercial gain cannot be allowed to set their own standards. Laws and regulations related to animal welfare reflect a nation's moral stand, and must, as a principle, be enforced by an independent body.
6. Elephants should be removed from all free contact situations where they are expected to perform on demand; the use of elephants in circuses and for elephant back safaris should be outlawed.
7. There should be no breeding of elephants in captivity, as this will only compound the current problem.
8. The 112 elephants in captivity now should either be released to the wild or semi wild; there are many ways in which these elephants can still benefit the country and her people.

In respect to the capture and training of elephants, South Africa is poised between the past and the future, a 4000-year tradition versus progressive, enlightened policy.

Will the new South Africa be remembered for continuing a tradition that a growing number of people find abhorrent, and that goes against key scientific truths, or will she ride the wave of change and lead the way forward?

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joyce H. Poole". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Joyce" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Poole".

Joyce H. Poole, PhD
Research Director
Amboseli Trust for Elephants