To Whom It May Concern,

In light of various questions and issues that have been raised regarding human interaction with lions, the following may give you some insight into our current position regarding lion petting:

The new Lion and Safari Park opened on the 16th of July and in accordance with our previous undertaking to stop cub petting, this activity was not available when the new park opened. We had every intention running the new park without cub petting and we tried to replace this with other activities. Unfortunately, this led to a dramatic and unexpected drop in the number of visitors and tour operators. We were told in no uncertain terms that the high demand for cub petting was causing them to rather visit our opposition where such activities are still offered.

The net result: We were not competing on a level playing field and, unless our competitors also stopped the cub petting, the massive R100m investment in our new world class facility, the survival of our business and the livelihoods of all our staff would be at stake.

Reluctantly, we had no choice but to temporarily re-introduce cub petting on the 13th of August 2016. We immediately sent letters to CACH (Campaign Against Canned Hunting), EWT (Endangered Wildlife Trust), NCPSA and other NGO’s and activist groups to explain our decision to invite concerned parties to discuss the situation going forward. This resulted in a very constructive meeting with the director of CACH whereupon it was decided to form a working group. The objective of the group would be to eradicate cub petting completely. The first meeting of the working group was in January 2017, which included NGO’s, wildlife professionals and a diverse cross section of industry players. See statement of intent by CCWG (Captive Carnivore Working Group) below.

In light of our commitment and determination to eradicate cub petting we are willing to join with, and help, other organisations and the government to ban cub petting altogether. We will give our full support to this cause and help to lobby the authorities to introduce legislation as soon as possible. As soon as this activity becomes illegal, all the players in this field will be in the same position and we will happily stop cub petting forever. We have already pre-empted this by taking steps to reduce breeding and have VASECTOMISED the majority of our males.

In the meantime, we can assure everyone that our lion cubs ARE NEVER SOLD TO HUNTERS. We abhor the concept of canned hunting and it is disappointing that wild assumptions and false accusations abound without even a shred of evidence to support them.

After the cubs are too old for petting which is a three-month period we keep them until they die of natural causes or we donate them to PAAZA (Pan African Association of Zoos and Aquariums) / WAZA (World Associations of Zoos and Aquariums) accredited facilities. We have, on our premises, over 70 lions, (some as old as 18), that are surplus to our requirements. Some of the lions may be involved in the making of documentaries, films and education thus contributing to conservation.
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The detailed records that we keep on all our lions are open for inspection to any authorities, organisations or public that wish to see them. All our cubs are micro-chipped so that their movements can be monitored throughout their lives and physically inspected.

We trust that this explains the very difficult predicament we find ourselves in.

Yours sincerely

The Lion and Safari Park Management
Statement of Intent issued by CCWG

A group of concerned members from diverse areas of operations and interests established a Captive Lion Working Group, with an initial specific focus on lion breeding and cub petting. The group met at Lion & Safari Park on 21 January 2017 to discuss the subject of captive lions, and cub petting in particular.

The diversity of the group is demonstrated by the mix of representatives, namely Onderstepoort, SA Vet Council, PAAZA, African Lion Working Group (IUCN SSC), Lion & Safari Park, SA Predators Association (SAPA), Campaign Against Canned Hunting (CACH), as well as independent specialists and consultants. The Department of Environmental Affairs and the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries were also invited to participate in the discussions, and representatives from both departments attended the meeting.

Under the facilitation of CBSG (IUCN Breeding Specialist Group), Constructive debate and input from this group of professional and experienced participants resulted in consensus that, despite differences in opinion and priorities, the working group would continue to operate and would pursue the drafting of an industry management plan for cub petting that can be circulated to the industry and key stakeholders for input.

It was agreed during the meeting that the group will continue as the Captive Carnivores Working Group.