



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rationale for planned cull of thousands of hippos in Zambia flawed?

Born Free says Zambian Government's own research shows that previous hippo culls in Luangwa have not controlled numbers

Born Free's recent breaking news that, in a secret move by the Zambian government, fee-paying trophy hunters are to be allowed to kill more than a thousand hippos over the next five years in Zambia was confirmed by Zambia's Minister of Tourism and Arts Charles Banda in a press statement issued by his press office.

Link to press statement: <https://www.atta.travel/member-news/2018/05/zambia-tourism-minister-clarifies-hippo-culling/>

Zambia's government claims that the cull, on the Luangwa River bordering Zambia's premier safari tourism destination South Luangwa National Park, is a bid to control numbers.

Although exact numbers have yet to be confirmed, and with original reports suggesting the proposed cull could involve as many as 2,000 animals over 5 years, the authorities say they plan to allow at least 250 hippos a year to be killed. A South African safari hunting company, Umlilo Safaris, has already started offering trophy hunters the chance to kill up to five of the hippos each on a hunting trip to Zambia. Each hunter will be charged up to \$14,000 for five hippos, potentially netting millions of dollars according to Umlilo Safari's Facebook site.

Born Free President, Will Travers OBE, stated: *"Zambia's Minister of Tourism and Arts, Charles Banda, is using much of the same flawed rationale for the proposed slaughter that the Zambian authorities used to try and justify the aborted 2016 cull. This was quickly dropped due to the strength of opposition from conservation organisations and both the national and international community, who challenged their justification for such drastic action."*

"On the contrary, published scientific research, conducted by the Zambia Wildlife Authority (ZAWA) itself, clearly shows that previous culls of hippo in the Luangwa River did not significantly affect population size and density. Put simply - temporarily leaving to one side the serious moral and ethical considerations associated with the killing of thousands of hippo - culling has not worked as a way of controlling the hippo population in Luangwa".

Scientific research into factors affecting the Luangwa hippo population, published by Dr. Chansa Chomba in the International Journal of Biodiversity and Conservation in 2013 when Dr Chomba headed up the Department of Research, Planning, Information and Veterinary Services for ZAWA, concluded that culls are ineffective in controlling the hippo population.

In this research, Dr. Chansa Chomba, who is now a senior lecturer in the School of Agriculture and Natural Resources at Mulungushi University in Zambia, reports that ZAWA had conducted a number of hippo culling and cropping schemes since the 1960s, up until the last culling programme commencing in 2005 that set out to cull more than 1,500 hippos over 8 years.

Dr Chomba reported that previous efforts by ZAWA to regulate the hippo population in the Luangwa using culling schemes and other management interventions had not been properly assessed. Because of that, the main factors regulating the hippo population were unknown. He also reported that data on the number of specimens culled, age structure and sex ratios from previous culling exercises had not been properly analysed.

His research, on behalf of ZAWA, aimed to assess the main factors regulating the Luangwa hippo population size over the period 1976 to 2008. Importantly, in light of the current planned cull, his research investigated the specific impact of culling over this 32-year period.

The results demonstrated that all culling programmes conducted in the Luangwa Valley since the 1960s, aimed at reducing the hippo population size, had failed, as the population quickly recovered after a cull. It also reported that it was well-documented in the scientific literature that the act of culling removes excess male hippos and frees up resources for the remaining females, leading to increased births and facilitating rather than suppressing population growth rate. He concluded that hippo culling actually stimulates population growth.

In this research, Dr Chomba also reported that, over the study period of 32 years, the hippo population in the Luangwa oscillated upwards and downwards in four cycles of about 8 years each, with natural environmental factors collectively forming environmental resistance or limitations. This ensured that the hippo population remained within the carrying capacity band for the entire period, 1976-2008. Furthermore, he reported that since the environmental factors are not constant, but rather fluctuate from year to year, the hippo population also followed the same pattern.

As Professor Richard Kock, professor of wildlife health at the Royal Veterinary College, said on the 6th June 2018, the Zambian government needed to provide robust scientific data in order to try and justify the cull. Not only has it failed to do so, but now we know that its own research shows that previous hippo culls in Luangwa have not only failed to control the population but, conversely, have actually stimulated population growth. It also shows that natural environmental factors have, instead, kept the population in check.

In light of this scientific research, Born Free calls on the Zambian government to abandon plans for the cull which, some suggest, seems more akin to a money-making exercise than an effective, scientifically-validated 'animal management' strategy.

-ENDS-

Notes to Editors:

The impact of human activities on the world's 130,000 surviving hippo, and in particular the trade in hippo ivory, will be debated on the 12th June by a House of Commons Committee review of proposed legislation aimed at shutting down the UK's domestic ivory markets.

Wild hippo numbers across Africa are under increasingly pressure with a maximum estimate of just 130,000 animals - about one third of the number of the high-profile African elephant. Furthermore, as efforts increase to end the trade in elephant ivory, hippos are being increasingly targeted for their ivory as a replacement. Latest data confirms that in the decade to 2016, more than 6,000 hippo teeth, 2,048 hippo tusks and a further 1,183 hippo 'trophies' were exported to EU Member States alongside thousands of other 'parts and products'. International trade records show that from 2004-2014 around 60,000 kg of hippo ivory were imported into Hong Kong.

Chomba C (2013). Factors affecting the Luangwa (Zambia) hippo population dynamics within its carrying capacity band – Insights for better management. *International Journal of Biodiversity and Conservation* Vol. 5(3), pp. 109-121.

Umlilo Safari's Facebook site - <https://www.facebook.com/Umlilo-Safaris-189690121075687/>

About Born Free

Born Free's mission is to ensure that all wild animals, whether living in captivity or in the wild, are treated with compassion and respect and are able to live their lives according to their needs. Born Free opposes the exploitation of wild animals in captivity and campaigns to keep wildlife in the wild.

Born Free promotes Compassionate Conservation to enhance the survival of threatened species in the wild and protect natural habitats while respecting the needs of and safeguarding the welfare of individual animals. Born Free seeks to have a positive impact on animals in the wild and protect their ecosystems in perpetuity, for their own intrinsic value and for the critical roles they play within the natural world. For more information about Born Free please visit: www.bornfree.org.uk

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