

MEDIA ALERT

01 JUNE 2020

SOUTH AFRICAN VETERINARY ASSOCIATION (SAVA) RESPONDS TO THE URGENT BAN ON TRADE AND USE OF WILDLIFE PRODUCTS MADE BY THE EMS FOUNDATION

01 June 2020, Johannesburg – Wildlife within the South African borders is a vital part in the country's heritage and a main attraction for local and international visitors. The South African Government has an obligation to act as a trustee of the environment, ensuring the safety of the country's wildlife and protecting wild animals against exploitation.

In recent letters to the government through their legal representatives, the EMS Foundation has requested the South African Governments to place an urgent ban of the human consumption of wildlife products within South African and a ban on the export of products deriving from wild animal for human consumption.

Considering the recent global pandemic, the COVID-19 outbreak has been linked to the wet wildlife market, especially in China, the [South African Veterinary Association](#) believes a holistic approach is more effective in protecting both human and animal health against zoonotic diseases rather than a blanket ban, which could have negative consequences on people and wild animals in South Africa.

As custodians of animal related public health and of animal welfare, the [South African Veterinary Association](#) (SAVA) feels compelled to respond to the ban request made by the EMS Foundation.

1. As an industry, [SAVA](#) is against illegal wildlife trade and support regulated trade promoting animal welfare and sustainability. We are of the opinion that a holistic approach to protect both human and animal health against zoonotic diseases are more effective than blanket bans. A One Health approach involves three pillars of human health, animal health and environmental health, and collectively considers environmental conservation factors, pathogen management factors, animal welfare factors, population immunity factors, public hygiene and reduction of poverty and starvation. A blanket ban in our opinion addresses only a small part of the scenario and will have far reaching counterproductive consequences for people and wild animals in South Africa.
2. We are of the opinion that the game industry and venison market is an important part of the SA economy enhancing the wellbeing of many of the citizens of South Africa and providing a very important protein source with minimal negative impact on the environment. We consider it an important factor to assist with the build-up of rural economies after the Covid-19 pandemic. We are concerned that a ban of trade and consumption will result in the further collapse of the industry and lead to the demise of millions of wild animals and the environment.
3. We support the provisions of the Meat Safety Act of 2000 and are of the opinion that the health and safety standards of well- regulated venison as practiced in South Africa is of EU and OIE standards and protects the health of both the public consumers here and abroad, and abattoir workers sufficiently. Improvement of meat safety standards for venison and in general should in our opinion be mitigated by means of consultation, education and regulation, and not by means of bans.

4. All meat derived from wild animals for public consumption is going through all the stringent controls of the Meat Safety Act of 2000. There is basically no evidence that the consumption of legally acquired game meat poses any threat to abattoir workers, nor to consumers.
5. The illegal trade in game meat (Bush meat), that might pose serious health threats, will continue despite the ban on the trade of game meat.
6. A blanket ban might even further increase the health risks as the bush meat trade will just go underground.
7. Currently there is also no proof that COVID-19 originated from legally slaughtered game meat made available under controlled circumstances for public consumption.

[SAVA](#) wishes to point out that zoonosis (a disease which can be transmitted to humans from animals) can occur as a result of poor meat safety practices in unregulated live stock meat and even non-animal markets and that education, regulation and improved welfare condition should be part of the mitigating solutions.

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For more information on the above from a SAVA member, please contact:

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