



MINISTERIAL TASK TEAM

Press Briefing

3 April 2024

Venue: Imbizo Center, 120 Plein Street



forestry, fisheries
& the environment

Department
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Background and Context

Challenges with the Industry

The captive lion industry confronts escalating ethical, regulatory, conservation, and economic hurdles that negatively affect South Africa's conservation and tourism reputation; alignment of the industry with the constitutional recognition of the right to a healthy environment.

Parliamentary Colloquium

Colloquium on Captive Lion Breeding for Hunting in South Africa in 2018: Recommended that a policy and legislative review of captive breeding of lions, should be initiated as a matter of urgency, with a view to putting an end to this practice.

High Level Panel (HLP)

Minister, in 2019 appointed a High-Level Panel (HLP) to review policies, legislation and practices relating to the management, breeding, hunting, trade and handling of elephant, lion, leopard and rhinoceros.

HLP Recommendations

In 2021, HLP majority recommendations were supported by Cabinet and the Minister announced the goal that **“South Africa does not breed lions in captivity, keep lions in captivity, or use captive lions or their derivatives commercially”**.

Development of Voluntary Exit Options

In December 2022, The Minister established the Ministerial Task Team (MTT) in accordance with Section 3A of (NEMBA). **Which directed the MTT to formulate a set of “win-win” voluntary exit options and pathways.**



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Terms of Reference and Guiding Legislation

Focus Areas – Terms of Reference

- i. Develop and undertake a process for the engagement of all stakeholders in the captive lion industry and relevant issuing authorities, including any vulnerable workers.
- ii. To plan and oversee an audit of existing captive lion breeding and keeping facilities nationally.
- iii. Develop and oversee the initial implementation of a voluntary exit strategy and pathways from the captive lion industry for stakeholders who wish to pursue this option.
- iv. Identify, mobilise, and endorse potential funding mechanisms, sources and procedures to support the voluntary exit strategy and pathways.
- v. Undertake additional tasks as identified during the course of their work.

Guiding Policy and Legislation

- White Paper on Conservation and Sustainable Use of South Africa's Biodiversity in relation to unsustainable practises on captive breeding, handling, hunting and trade in lions.
- Using the underlying pillars of sustainable use as encapsulated in the White Paper.
- Relevant principles outlined in the White Paper and NEMBA, including maximising conservation benefit while minimising potential risks, and applying the definition of animal well-being in NEMBA.
- Policy Position on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Elephant, Lion, Leopard and Rhinoceros.



Methodology

Desktop Study and Analysis

- Studied the Terms of Reference, peer-reviewed publications, legislative environment, the HLP and other relevant reports, international cases studies (e.g. closure of the Mink, bears for bile, etc industries).
- Developed a set of principles to guide the work of the MTT.

The Stakeholder Engagement Process

- Issuing public notices for comment, identifying and actively engaging with a broad spectrum of stakeholders, including those both in favour of and opposed to the industry.
- Identifying potential voluntary exit candidates and gathering opinions and information to aid the formulation of more viable voluntary exit pathways and strategies;
- Obtaining expert input and advice on specific components to develop protocols and best practice guidelines; and
- Incorporating stakeholders' inputs in overall recommendations.

Industry Audit

- Lions were considered captive unless actively managed under Lion Management Forum (LiMF) or in SANBI's managed wild lion list.
- Sourcing the best existing data and verifying the data against permits issued by provincial authorities
- Verifying data against recent compliance inspections of facilities.
- Audit of nature conservation and biodiversity laws, policies, and regulations concerning captive lions across all provinces.

Formulating Voluntary Exit Options

- Recommendations stemming from extensive stakeholder engagement process, and the National audit findings were used to develop a comprehensive set of potential exit pathways.
- Each potential exit pathways was analysed to evaluate the viability and associated risks based on financial risks, socio-economic impacts, impact on vulnerable workers, conservation impacts, while prioritising the well-being of the captive lions.

Engaged with Conservation and Animal-welfare NGOs to mobilise resources for the voluntary exit programme.

Focus Area 1 – Stakeholder Engagement Main Findings



Main Findings:

- National departments and provinces consulted expressed support for the voluntary exit programme.
- Although the Industry Associations did not oppose voluntary exit, they strongly advocated for maintaining the status quo and strengthening enforcement of compliance.
- Conservation and animal welfare NGOs overwhelming support the programme, as the first step in implementing the DFFE's policy position objectives for closure of the industry.
- A number of facility owners have come forward willing to explore the voluntary exit pathways, particularly facilities facing financial pressures and wanting more future certainty.
- The MTT proposed incentivising voluntary exit. Given, the highly constrained budget of DFFE the MTT has raised financial and non-financial commitments from conservation NGOs to support the implementation of phase one and two, with conditions that these lions are sterilised.
- Many of the facilities that want to exit and other stakeholders, are concerned with the remaining facilities taking up the demand in the market thereby increasing the number of lions in the remaining facilities.
- The varying provincial policies reflects significant diversity in the policy landscape across the country.
- The capacity of provinces should be improved to ensure that "Animal Well-Being" as approved in NEMBA (2023) is uniformly applied through providing guidelines and training.



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Focus Areas 2 – National Audit Main Findings

South Africa has the largest captive lion population in the world, with increasing diversification into other carnivore species.



7,838 lions



626 tigers

At least 2,315 other captive carnivores, including tigers, cheetahs & servals



342 facilities

Free State, North-West & Limpopo house 93% of captive lions

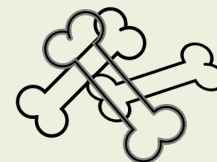


Between 1,568 - 2,069 employees

Extrapolated employment figures from various data sources

Estimated lion bone stockpiles:

- 2,888 whole carcasses
- 275 skeletons (no skull)
- 636 skulls
- 765 kg of bones
- 292 whole skins



3,163 skeletons

Summary - Key Findings

The Industry is large and complex with a long history which is **not aligned with both current international trends and domestic policy changes on conservation.**

Levels of **compliance are low and can be expected to remain as such**, with high profile reports of incidents of animal abuse that are affecting the reputation of the country as a premier wild-life destination.

Industry Associations advocate for **maintaining the status quo**, with better enforcement by government. Additionally, they are calling for the government to **reintroduce the lion bone export quota.**

Conservation and animal welfare NGOs have argued strongly that the industry should be shut down, as recommended by the HPL and the DFFE. They however concede that is a complex process and that voluntary exit should be the first steps in the process, while ensuring that the industry's growth is halted through sterilisation of lions.

Facility owners across six provinces, representing a diverse range of facility sizes and types, expressed their **interest to consider voluntarily exit from the industry, pending government's approval of the exit options.** Some facilities are experiencing financial constraints raising concerns about their ability to comply with well-being of lions.

Most employees are **not exclusively focused on tasks related to captive lions**; they are also engaged in other agricultural or related activities on behalf of the facility owner.

In general stakeholders in the report back sessions supported the voluntary exit pathways. **Preference has been expressed for a "phase out" option, rehoming of lions in lion safe havens, and transition to more sustainable businesses.**

Conservation and animal welfare NGOs have **committed to provide financial and non-financial support for Phases 1 and 2 .** Lion safe havens have expressed **willingness to increase their capacity where possible** – based on land availability and financial resources. They have also agreed to train existing facilities that want to repurpose into lion safe havens.

Voluntary Exit Options and Implementation Protocols

Mandatory Prerequisites for All Voluntary Exit Options:

- Humane euthanasia of compromised lions
- Population control preferably by surgical sterilization

Viable Voluntary Exit Options:

1. Humane euthanasia of all lions and permanent exit from the industry
2. Phase out through trade opportunities for a period of 24 months
3. Surrender of lions to lion safe havens
4. Repurposing of existing facility to a lion safe haven
5. Repurposing of existing facility for biodiversity conservation and sustainable use
6. Surrender of lions to authorities
7. Lion bone stockpiles surrendered
8. Lion bone stockpiles surrendered and trade out for a period of 24 months

Unviable Voluntary Exit Options:

9. Population control by same sex separation
10. Rewilding of captive and captive-bred lions

Protocols for Voluntary Exit Implementation

Quality of Life Assessment

Euthanasia Protocol

Carcass Disposal Protocol

Population Control Protocol

Transport Protocol

Best Practice Guidelines for Keeping
of African Lions in Controlled
Environments

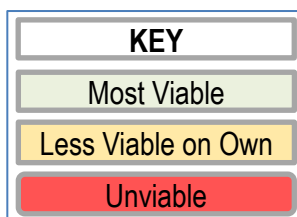
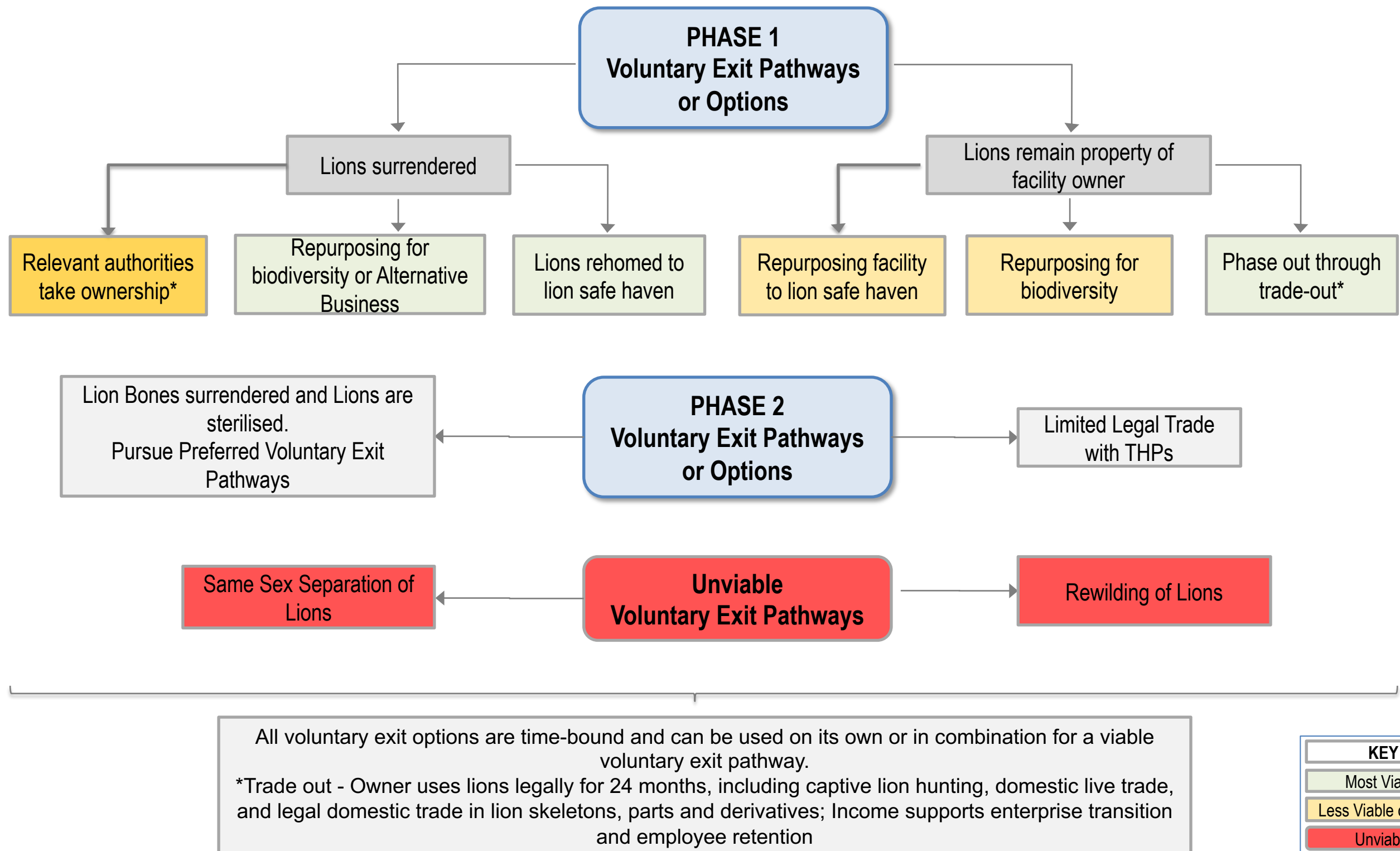


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Conclusions – Viability - Voluntary Exit Pathways



Key Recommendations



The MTT recommends that government approve Phase 1: Engage voluntary exit candidates to finalise the pathways and exit terms.



The MTT recommends that the government endorse Phase Two of voluntary exit, Acquisition and incineration of lion bone stockpiles contingent upon sterilisation of lions and compliance with the voluntary exit principles.

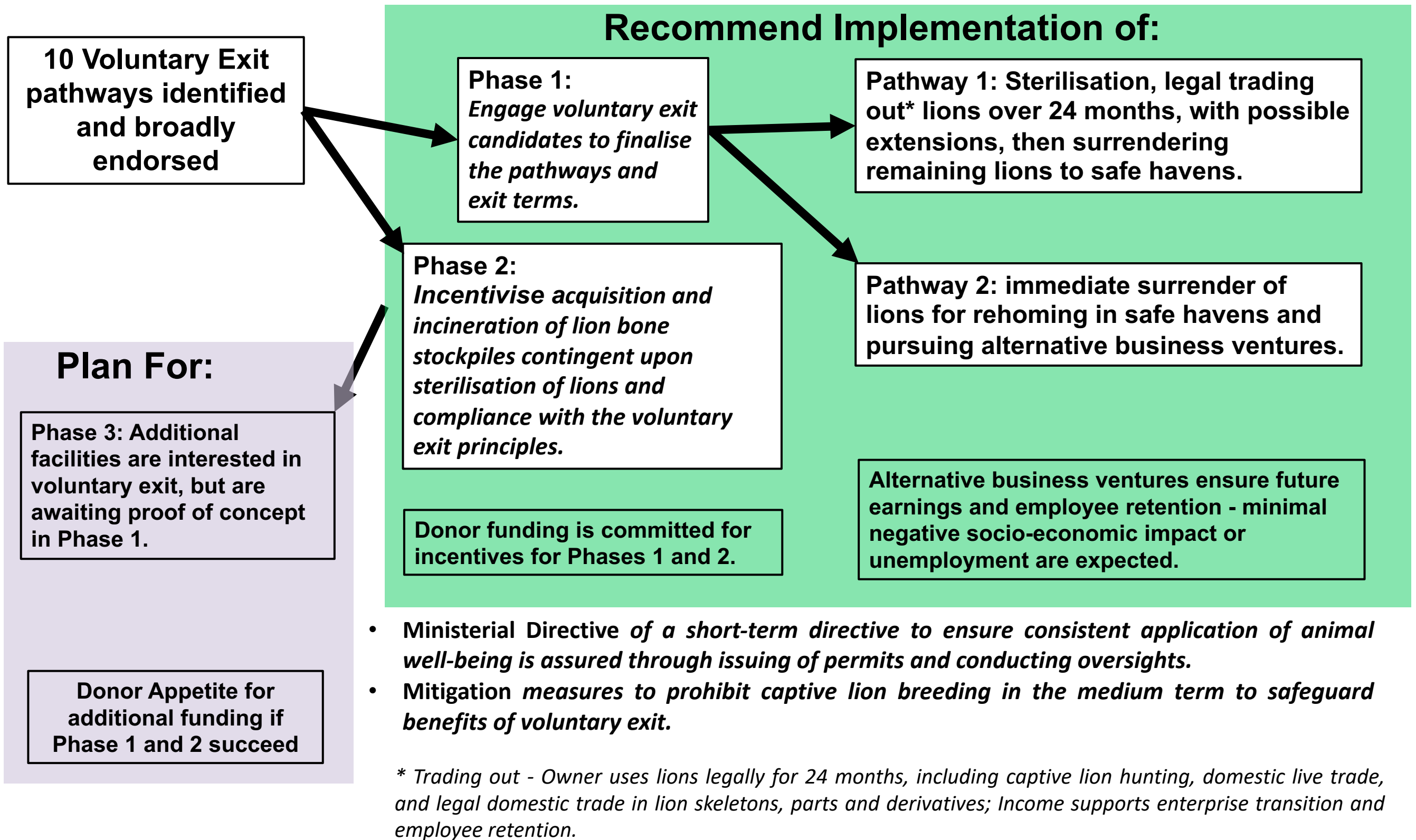


The MTT recommends the implementation of a short-term directive to ensure consistent application of animal well-being is assured through issuing of permits and conducting oversights.



The MTT suggests that the Minister consider implementing measures to prohibit captive lion breeding in the medium term to safeguard benefits of voluntary exit.

Recommendations



Thank You

Acknowledgement:

- Minister Barbara Creecy – for her confidence and support to the Team.
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- Stakeholders – for their insights and support.

