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## A Strategy to secure the right to hunt

Living in the information era, we are bombarded with information at a mind boggling pace. Strategists have the challenge to filter from this, a picture that represents reality as it is of relevance to an evaluation of their area of concern. The question now is: What is reality as applicable to the future of hunting?

**The threat to habitat is growing.** An increase in population densities have as a result the converting of 'natural' habitat to 'human only' habitat, with a resultant threat to biodiversity. People in general realise this and there is growing support for some form of conservation. Unfortunately the instinctive choice, especially to urbanites, is to go the way of 'non-use'. And **non-use proponents have it wrong.** We can only conserve successfully by taking the scientific and non-emotional approach of sustainable utilisation.

**Animal rightists have the resources.** They form part of the global conflict movement that build semi-private financial empires in the process of fighting popular issues. The top four international animal rights organisations have a combined yearly budget of \$103m. And they have a shrewd strategy. They identify hunting practices that borders on the unethical and then work on gaining visual material for a television expose on it e.g. the Cook report on canned lion hunting. This garners emotional public support which allows them to define the practice such that it includes also the ethical version of that practice. Next comes the domino effect. They now build on their success in having defined canned lion hunting, to also include other species. They have already labeled bred-for-release bird hunting as 'canned'. Next all rhino hunting will be claimed canned. Then they will build on these successes by claiming hunting on small ranches to be canned. First ranches smaller than 500ha, then 1000ha, then 5000ha.

**Hunting associations are cultural organisations.** We are, in fact, by far the largest cultural organisations in the country. Hunting might be the common denominator, but the distinguishing factor is really the theme of 'ethical hunting'. Unfortunately, ethical hunting and fair chase cannot be published as a set of rules. Different cultures view ethics differently. And as hunting practices change from desert to bushveld, so does ethical hunting mean different things in different areas of our land.

The next step in designing an effective strategy, is defining a vision of the ideal end state. For hunters **the ideal environment** will be one with a distinct positive attitude, politically and socially, to pro-use. Scientists and conservationists in government organisations are certainly in favour of sustainable utilisation. The politicians, however, are not easily convinced to act in the interest of sustainable use. The reason is one of sensitivity to public opinion. Animal rights proponents are so verbal that the perception with decision makers is that the general public might have an instinctive (even if in error) bias towards non-use. Ideally, public opinion should lean heavily in favor of sustainable use, if not outright in favor of hunting. This can only be achieved by an active campaign to project a positive image of hunting and hunters.

Which brings us to the establishment of the strategy.

Organised hunting should have a two legged strategy in securing the right to hunt.

On **grassroots level**, as cultural organisations, hunting associations should offer members a form of union, enjoyment, excitement and value for money. Enthusiastic hunters should not be bored with political strategy and the antics of the animal rights activists. Rather ensure, through excitement in hunting, that we **popularise hunting and bolster numbers**. Numbers is what counts in a democracy and we currently represent only 35'000 out of an accepted figure of 200'000 hunters.

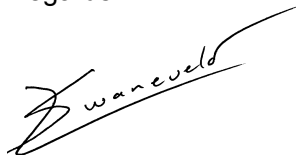
Hunting is a form of escaping the modern world of grit and conflict. The global conflict movement is the last thing that a recreational hunter should be troubled with when he escapes to the hunting field. Enjoyment of organised hunting will also ensure that we **perpetuate the hunting heritage**. We should excite and train our youth to carry on the tradition of hunting.

Through this strategy of exciting and strong associations, can we also establish a common culture and a **culture of ethical hunting**. Even if we only define 'ethical' as subscribing to 'a standard' or 'a code'. Because this attitude and the resultant conduct, is essential in promoting a positive image of hunting and the hunter. But ethical hunting is not only a mind set. It also requires some form of capacity on the side of the hunter. Especially when the principle of fair chase is at stake. When training and practice becomes a social and enjoyable experience, we can create competent hunters, which in turn have the capacity to hunt ethically and in accordance with the principles of fair chase.

The second leg of our approach is confined to the **management level**. Here we should focus on establishing a **capacity to lobby**. I am of the opinion that, individually, South Africa's utilisation associations do not possess the resources to achieve this. Combined, however, we certainly do! A combined industry, representing game farmers, hunters and professionals, will also empower us to take a **pro-active and united stance** on conservation issues. We should be first in defining the meaning of practices like e.g. canned hunting. Then we will be able to set acceptable standards and practices which leave no room for exploitation.

The 15 person strong National Advisory Council for the Environment was announced on 24 February by the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. The role of this council is to involve stake holders in the environmental decision making process. It is an absolute tragedy that utilisation associations have no representation in this Council. This sad state of affairs must be corrected at the first possible opportunity. Will a strategy of a united lobby ensure that? I firmly believe it will.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Swanevelder', written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Ludolph Swanevelder  
National Chair: **CHASA**