



COURT VICTORY FOR SPRINGBOK [OWNERS]

HIGH COURT CONFIRMS WRSA'S CHALLENGE AND SETS ASIDE UNLAWFUL GAUTENG BAN ON THE KEEPING OF SPRINGBOK IN THE SPRINGBOKVLAKTE

PRETORIA, 8 MAY 2026 – In a decisive victory for the wildlife ranching industry, the High Court of South Africa, Gauteng Division, Pretoria, today made an order reviewing and setting aside a series of restrictive conditions that had been unlawfully inserted by the Gauteng Department of Social Development, Agriculture, Rural Development and Environment into exemption permits issued under section 47 of the Nature Conservation Ordinance No 12 of 1983.

Wildlife Ranching South Africa (WRSA) approached the Court on behalf of its members and the broader game ranching industry after the Department began imposing conditions that had no basis in the empowering legislation.

One of the triggers for the litigation was the Gauteng government's decision to ban the keeping of Springbok on the Springbokvlakte (translated "Springbuck plains"), north of Pretoria, a region quite literally named after the herds that have roamed there for generations.

What was ordered

The Court has reviewed and set aside the policy and/or conduct of the Department to impose the following conditions in exemption permits (Gauteng's equivalent of a certificate of adequate enclosure):

1. Conditions declaring species of game as so-called "**extra-limital**" to the Gauteng Province;
2. Conditions imposing an obligation on permit holders to **phase out**, and/or **prohibiting the introduction of**, species declared "**extra-limital**";
3. Conditions imposing an obligation to apply for an **intensive breeding permit**; and



4. Conditions imposing an obligation to submit a so-called “**ecological management plan**”.

Importantly, the Court further ordered that any holder of an exemption permit issued under section 47 of the Ordinance, and which is valid as at the date of the Order, shall, for the duration of that permit, be exempt from compliance with these conditions. All other conditions in such permits remain in force.

The First and/or Second Respondents were ordered to pay the costs of the application on a party and party scale, including the costs of two counsel.

After WRSA's counsel partially argued its case on the first day of the hearing on 6 May 2026, the Respondents capitulated and agreed to the Order before commencement on the second day of the hearing on 8 May 2026.

[Why this matters for wildlife ranchers](#)

The conditions set aside today had been imposed without any empowering provision in the Ordinance and without any forewarning to the industry. They threatened to cripple commercial game ranching operations in Gauteng by:

- Forcing ranchers to phase out indigenous species such as Springbok, Nyala and Gemsbok, species long listed in the Schedules to the Ordinance and lawfully kept in Gauteng for decades;
- Prohibiting the reintroduction or replenishment of those species, with severe consequences for genetic diversity, herd viability and the long-term sustainability of operations;
- Requiring permit holders to apply for an “*intensive breeding permit*” in respect of Sable and Buffalo, a permit type not provided for or defined anywhere in the Ordinance or in any other environmental legislation; and
- Demanding the submission of a so-called “*ecological management plan*”, again with no statutory definition or empowering framework.

For many small and medium-sized game ranching enterprises, these conditions represented a direct threat to commercial viability, jobs and the conservation gains that wildlife ranching has



delivered over decades. The judgment confirms that organs of state may not exercise powers beyond those conferred upon them by law.

Statement from WRSA

"Today's order is a resounding victory not just for WRSA and our members, but for the rule of law and for every wildlife rancher who plays by the rules. Our members have for decades operated lawful, sustainable enterprises that contribute meaningfully to conservation, food security, job creation, rural employment and the rural economy. The irrational conditions and policies of the Department place all of this at risk. Declaring Springbok foreign to the very plains that bear their name is rather like declaring sand extra-limital to the Kalahari."

"We approached the Court reluctantly, but we did so in the best interest of our member and the broader industry as the principle at stake was simply too important to ignore: public power must be exercised lawfully, rationally and within the bounds of the empowering legislation. The Court has now again confirmed that principle."

"WRSA will continue to engage constructively with the Gauteng authorities on a sound, lawful and science-based regulatory framework for wildlife ranching. We remain committed to responsible conservation through sustainable use, but that framework must be built on legality, not on conditions plucked from thin air."

– Richard York, Chief Executive Officer, WRSA

What this means in practice for members

- **Existing permit holders** with valid section 47 exemption permits as of 8 May 2026 are, for the duration of those permits, exempt from compliance with the four categories of conditions set out above.
- **All other permit conditions** remain in force for the duration of the relevant permit. Members must continue to comply with those conditions.
- **The respondents' powers** to issue exemption permits and to attach lawful conditions in terms of the Ordinance are not taken away by the Order. The judgment is targeted at the four categories of unlawful conditions, not at the permitting regime as a whole.



- **Members are encouraged** to review their current permits and contact the WRSA office should they have any queries about how the Order applies to their specific situation.

Background

The Nature Conservation Ordinance No 12 of 1983 has been in operation since January 1984 and was assigned to the Gauteng province in 1995. WRSA members and other game ranchers have for decades obtained exemption permits under section 47 of the Ordinance to lawfully hunt, catch and sell game in Gauteng.

The species at the heart of this matter are all indigenous to South Africa and are listed in the Schedules to the Ordinance. The Department conceded that the Ordinance does not define or refer to “extra-limital” species, that the relevant species had historically been authorised to be kept, hunted and sold in Gauteng, and that these species had been unlawfully listed as “**extra-limital**”.

– ENDS –

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