RESPONSE TO GREEN GROUP SIMONSTOWN’S

OPEN LETTER: PERMANENT REMOVAL OF THE SIMON'S TOWN BABOONS RAISES SERIOUS QUESTIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE, PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND CONSERVATION.

October 2026

Dear Mayor and JTT members,

Open letter: Permanent removal of the Simon's Town baboons raises serious questions of environmental governance, public participation and conservation.

Ironically, while our Table Mountain has been chosen as the centrepiece of the latest UNESCO World Heritage Series coin from France's Monnaie de Paris, with the design paying tribute to the extraordinary Cape Floral Region, the City is going to soon remove about 60 chacma baboons from that landscape.

RESPONSE: *There are no free ranging chacma baboon troops in any other major metropoles of South Africa despite their recent historical presence in all of these areas. This affirms the uniqueness of the Cape Peninsula and Cape Town from a biodiversity conservation and baboon perspective and our clear commitment to our urban wildlife and a future that includes baboons as an integral part of that rich biodiversity. The commitment, scale of resources allocated and continued perseverance in managing baboons as part of our urban wildlife within our city boundaries is a unique characteristic of Cape Town unmatched anywhere else in South Africa and Africa.*

Green Group Simonstown NPC (GGST) has been actively engaged in environmental and biodiversity protection, wildlife advocacy, and public participation processes affecting the Cape Peninsula, False Bay, and surrounding ecosystems of Cape Town. The organisation therefore has a direct and substantial interest in decisions that may affect the ecological health, environmental resilience, biodiversity, and future sustainability of the Cape Town region and the well-being of its communities.

GGST is writing to raise serious concerns about the City of Cape Town's decision to permanently remove the Waterfall and Seaforth chacma baboon troops from Simon's Town and place them in permanent captivity at the City's Urban Wildlife Centre at Kogelfontein.

The City's Action Plan provides for the animals to be captured, assessed and moved into purpose-built enclosures, with healthy males vasectomised. Once removed, they will not return to their former free-ranging lives. This decision deserves scrutiny well beyond the immediate question of baboon management. It raises fundamental questions about environmental governance, public participation, animal welfare, conservation and the City's responsibilities within one of the world's most important biodiversity landscapes.

RESPONSE: *Your description above does little justice to the reality of the two troops in Simon's Town and suggests that the authorities are moving to capture two healthy wild troops living predominantly in natural habitat. The facts are quite the opposite - both these troops spend upwards of 40-50% of their waking hours foraging, resting and utilising the urban environment and routinely sleep in buildings in the urban environment. This continues despite substantial resources aimed at deterring them from the urban area and keeping them in the natural environment. Their diet is highly dependent on manufactured carbohydrates; their behaviour is completely altered showing high levels of habituation to people (some of whom actively feed them) in addition to nocturnal foraging and movement in urban areas. These behaviours result in extreme harm to baboons, have significant negative impacts on the residents of Simon's Town and offers no conservation benefit. There are baboons living through winter conditions without a pelage, there are baboons with few to no teeth, there are regular injuries and deaths linked to urban areas that are associated with extreme suffering. No ecologist or primatologist would describe these as "healthy wild baboons" or that it is appropriate or acceptable from an ecological or welfare perspective for baboons to be living in urban environments in this manner.*

Cape Town remains committed to a sustainable well managed population of approximately 525 free ranging chacma baboons on the peninsula where adequate low lying resource rich habitat remains available. This population size aligns with the recommended carrying capacity of the peninsula.

UNESCO World Heritage recognised and is today celebrating this area for its Outstanding Universal Value, including its exceptional biodiversity and ongoing ecological and biological processes. The baboons are part of this living landscape.

UNESCO has already been alerted to concerns about the baboon population, and in December 2025 confirmed that it had received the JTT's updated Action Plan and was reviewing it with IUCN.

We therefore ask UNESCO and IUCN to clarify the status of that review and whether the proposed permanent removal and captivity of these wild baboons has been considered in relation to the conservation objectives and Outstanding Universal Value of the World Heritage Area.

GGST, which was elected by the Simon's Town community and supporting organisations to represent them on the Cape Peninsula Baboon Advisory Group (BAG) established by the Joint Task Team (City of Cape Town, SANParks and CapeNature), has resigned from this Advisory Group. We made clear our position: *"We did not join the Advisory Group to lend legitimacy to decisions we fundamentally question. We joined because we believed participation meant that evidence, community experience and viable alternatives would influence the outcome. For approximately seven months, we repeatedly raised the same fundamental concerns. We have not seen those concerns meaningfully reflected in the decisions being implemented. We won't endorse something that, in our view, amounts to a zoo."*

RESPONSE: *Every concern and comment raised by the GGST as well as subsequent letters have been responded to in writing to the GGST. Where comments or inputs were supported, this is highlighted, where not, the reason is provided. These responses stand as transparent and open public record as to the decisions made.*

We are not alone. The Wildlife Animal Protection Forum South Africa (WAPFSA), a national network of wildlife, conservation, environmental and community organisations, has repeatedly opposed the permanent captivity of the Simon's Town baboons. It argues that the plan disregards their natural free-ranging existence and that evidence-based coexistence measures should be implemented, evaluated and transparently monitored before permanent captivity is considered. WAPFSA has also put forward alternatives including secure waste systems, targeted spatial exclusion, non-lethal behavioural management, community coexistence measures and habitat interventions.

A letter sent to the Mayor of Cape Town by WAPFSA dated the 29 September 2026, places on record that for WAPFSA, Chacma Baboons (and we quote directly – the underline is for emphasis):

"baboons are ecological generalists, a true natural space must provide three core environmental modules. Baboons are primarily terrestrial, ground-dwelling omnivores. A natural foraging space requires:

Diverse Vegetation: Access to indigenous flora, such as African savannas, woodlands, grasslands, or Cape fynbos, where they can find grasses, seeds, roots, tubers, and fruits.

Faunal Resources: Natural ground space where they can flip rocks to find protein-rich invertebrates, scorpions, and small vertebrates.

Foraging Topography: Baboons inherently prefer low-lying land with rich soils and high primary productivity for their daily food search."

This underlined position by WAPFSA aligns directly with our communicated position that there is insufficient low-lying habitat available to these two troops therefore locking them into an endless cycle of urban conflict and poor welfare outcomes. In fact, neither the Waterfall troop of Seaforth troop have ever had access to sufficient low-lying habitat as both troops established from the Smitswinkel troop and took up marginal space with an immediate dependence on the urban environment for their resources. It is essential to point out that both troops formed during periods when the baboon management guidelines were not being applied. Both troops also adopted an urban foraging lifestyle at the outset of their formation. It is only through sustained management efforts that either troop spends any time in natural habitat. We consider this to be an unsustainable scenario in which substantial resources achieve poor welfare outcomes for baboons and people.

It is counter intuitive that WAPFSA members would state the importance of low-lying resources rich habitat availability as one of three central factors for the success and welfare of baboons but would promote the retention of troops in an area where this is

unavailable with the resulting poor welfare outcomes and entrenched urban conflict. The absence of this low-lying land is a reality that cannot be changed.

This position has no conservation, welfare, social, economic or community value. Spatial exclusion from Simon's Town would not change the unavailability of the preferred habitat.

Francesca de Gasparis, director of the South Africa Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI) and also a member of the BAG, has also opposed the removals. She has described the response to the crisis as showing "a profound lack of understanding of the important role baboons play in the functioning of our fynbos ecosystem".

RESPONSE: *The JTT notes the acknowledgment of both GGST and SAFCEI that the current status quo of baboon in Simon's Town is by your definition a "crisis". The JTT has made clear a similar view that the current status quo is not an acceptable situation for baboons or people and needs urgent rectification.*

As it relates to Ms de Gasparis view that the JTT has a profound lack of understanding please note that both baboon troops in question in fact only inhabit and utilise a very narrow range of natural habitat immediately adjacent to human modified landscapes in which they prefer to forage. The only scientific peer-reviewed home range data for the WF troop was published by Kaplan et al. (2011), Hoffman and O'Riain (2012) and Kaplan and O'Riain (2015). All of these papers reveal a very small home range, low daily travel distances and high use of urban areas.

Further, and most importantly, the removal of the Seaforth and Waterfall troops to the Urban Wildlife Centre will not result in the loss of the ecological role of baboons in the South Peninsula fynbos ecosystem as suggested by Ms de Gasparis. On the contrary, approximately 275 free ranging baboons will remain in the South Peninsula, and another 250 free ranging baboons will remain in the Northern Peninsula.

The Cape of Good Hope SPCA, also a member of the BAG, has likewise raised welfare concerns. In July, it stated that it did not support placing free-roaming, wild-caught baboons into a sanctuary as a long-term management solution.

This is therefore not simply a disagreement between the City and a handful of residents. Organisations with different mandates and areas of expertise have independently raised concerns about the proposal and about the absence of sufficiently demonstrated alternatives to permanent removal.

RESPONSE: *There is no merit or reasonable argument from a conservation, animal welfare, social, economic or community perspective to allow the current situation in Simon's Town to continue any longer.*

<u>A failure of management must be examined before the animals are removed</u>

At the heart of this issue is a failure of management and environmental leadership. Management should have been independently scrutinised in each affected area before the permanent removal of any troop was considered. Instead, rangers were moved between troops and areas, approaches changed, and the consequences of those changes were never properly examined in public.

Those of us who live alongside these baboons do not depend entirely on management reports to understand what is happening. We observe these troops every day. We see when they are settled, when they are being effectively managed, when they are disrupted and stressed, and when management decisions make the situation worse.

Baboon management has changed over the years, but the central problem remains. When management does not produce the desired outcome, responsibility has repeatedly been placed on the animals rather than on the human environment in which the conflict occurs.

Primatologist Dave Gaynor has warned that confining 60 free-ranging, wild-born chacma baboons into an enclosure that is 292 times smaller than their natural range might become "a monument to management failure".

***RESPONSE**: The natural range as claimed by Dr Gaynor above reflects troop movement over extended periods and reflects the maximum extent that troops like Waterfall have been displaced over more than 15 years of concerted non-lethal management effort. This is not a home range and provides no data on the behaviour of baboons when in these areas (i.e., whether they are foraging, locomoting, resting). The only scientific peer-reviewed home range data for the WF troop was published by Kaplan et al. (2011), Hoffman and O'Riain (2012) and Kaplan and O'Riain (2015). All of these papers reveal a very small home range, low daily travel distances and high use of urban areas. It is only when management commenced in 2010 that the WF troop was pushed into using natural habitat in the vicinity of SANAD. Use of these areas is therefore not a reflection of their natural movement patterns and habitat choice, but rather of ongoing and costly management effort.*

The research also revealed that the Waterfalls troop's home range was very small when they were not actively managed as they are now. Some days the troop moved less than 1km in a whole day, descending from their cliff sleeping site in the morning, visiting Happy Valley home for direct food handouts from the residents (Kaplan, 2013), moving onto SA Navy and residential land and then returning to the sleeping site again. Baboons and other wild animals only move to meet their essential needs of food, water, sleeping sites and predator avoidance, and will use the smallest area in which they can achieve these goals.

Given that chacma baboons are a 'least concern' species (IUCN, 2019), and the Peninsula baboons provide no unique genetic benefit to the species, the conservation-based approach to removal would be culling. The Urban Wildlife Centre is an alternative to this.

Placing the two troops in the Urban Wildlife Centre in semi-wild enclosures where we believe we can meet their needs under fulltime care has been chosen as an alternative to the culling of both troops.

The clear stated intention of the Urban Wildlife Centre is to allow the individual baboons from the Seaforth and Waterfall troops to live out their lives in a safe and secured natural environment under human management and care as an alternative to culling them.

Waste is part of the management problem, and it has not been fixed

Waste should be treated as an urgent environmental issue rather than merely a baboon problem. The Western Cape has committed to diverting 100% of organic waste from landfill by 2027, following an interim target of 50% by 2022. Yet there has been little visible public education teaching ordinary households why organic waste should not be placed in general refuse. Removing food waste from bins would help reduce wildlife attractants, methane emissions and pressure on dwindling landfill space. In many circumstances, educating and enabling households to separate organic waste would achieve more than simply providing a baboon-proof bin.

The City's own Action Plan recognises waste management as a central intervention. It provides for a Baboon Waste Management Strategy covering residential waste, recycling, composting, public spaces, commercial areas, public resorts and waste management by the South African Navy, SANParks and other land managers.

The rollout of baboon-proof bins was announced in early September, with the first 2,200 of a planned 6,000 bins due to be distributed from mid-September. Simonstown is excluded from that rollout because the City intends to capture the Waterfall and Seaforth troops and place them in permanent captivity instead. *That sequencing deserves scrutiny. If the underlying attractants remain, removing one set of baboons does not remove the conditions that will keep on drawing wildlife into the urban environment.*

***RESPONSE**: The Action Plan recognises the importance of waste management which resulted in the finalisation of the first ever Baboon Waste Management Plan. This includes the substantial investment of an initial 6000 baboon-proof bins being rolled out to established high impact areas. If this roll out shows efficacy and benefit the City is committed to rolling out further baboon-proof bins to wider areas.*

However, the following has been stated before and is re-iterated here:

- *The urban environment offers many resources and opportunities for baboons and remains attractive to them beyond waste especially where resource rich habitat is limited*
- *Perfect waste management in Simon's Town would not alter the lack of available low-lying resource rich habitat for these two troops*
- *Many of the baboons in these two troops are adept at entering and breaking into houses to access human resources. These are learned behaviours transferred to other baboons and extend far beyond reasonable waste management expectations.*

It is also important to note that GGST objected to the Baboon Waste Management Plan during its review with the written request by the GGST that the JTT:

"Immediately suspend the implementation of the Draft Waste Management Strategy".

The irreversible step

For years, baboons have been chased, paintballed, harassed and subjected to increasingly intensive forms of disruptive management. Have these methods solved the underlying problem? The persistence of the conflict suggests they have not.

RESPONSE: *Agreed. These measures are inadequate where there is insufficient preferred low-lying habitat and is indicative of the cost baboons are willing to endure to access the urban resources. These two troops have always utilised the urban environment for their resources. This position of the importance of preferred low-lying resource rich habitat to baboons is also the formal position of WAPFSA.*

Instead of addressing this failure, the Seaforth and Waterfall chacmas are planned to be trapped and removed. We strongly question the repeated use of health and welfare concerns to justify permanent confinement without transparent, independent veterinary evidence that can be publicly scrutinised. If welfare is genuinely the determining consideration, then management must first be scrutinised, attractants addressed, access to natural habitat protected and reasonable coexistence measures implemented and evaluated before the most extreme and irreversible intervention is undertaken.

RESPONSE: *Welfare is not the only determining factor. It is one (a very important one) of multiple factors that have been set out at length in all communications.*

However, as it relates to welfare alone, we are surprised that WAPFSA would suggest that welfare especially in the Waterfall troop is not poor and that the status quo should be allowed to continue. Every baboon carcass is x-rayed and in almost all dead baboons, multiple air rifle pellets are found, this includes juveniles. Baboons are shot with firearms. There are baboons living through winter conditions without a pelage, there are baboons with little to no teeth. Baboons are actively fed by some residents of Simon's Town as if they were domestic pets, they have excessive access to highly processed carbohydrate rich and sugar based foods, they are completely habituated and unafraid of people, they routinely roost in buildings, often in their own faeces and amongst broken asbestos roofing, glass and litter, they suffer poisoning, daily exposure to dogs, cars, pepper spray, paintballing and other stresses. These living conditions are not acceptable for our wildlife.

South Africa's Constitution does not treat environmental protection as an optional luxury to be pursued when convenient. Section 24 recognises the right to an environment that is not harmful to health and well-being and requires reasonable measures to prevent pollution and ecological degradation. The City is also increasingly confronted with difficult questions about sewage, coastal pollution, water, herbicides and contaminants, biodiversity loss and large-scale developments such as data centres. These issues are different in nature and scale, but they point to a common challenge: how Cape Town grows and develops while respecting the

ecological limits and public interests that sustain the city. Its mountains, coastline, fynbos and wildlife are not obstacles to development. They are part of the ecological foundation of the city and a heritage that underpins much of its cultural and economic worth.

The baboon issue is more than the fate of two troops. It reflects a choice about how a biodiversity city, a national park and the permit-issuing authorities respond when human development comes into conflict with the natural systems that sustain them.

We ask the City to pause and account for this decision. We therefore call on the City to pause the permanent removal (or the killing) of the Waterfall and Seaforth troops and to provide clear, publicly accessible answers to the following questions:

1. What independent evidence demonstrates that permanent captivity is necessary for these two troops? ‘

2. What evidence demonstrates that reasonable coexistence alternatives have been exhausted?

3. Why are the troops being removed before the City's own waste management interventions have been properly implemented and evaluated in Simon's Town?

4. What independent veterinary assessment has determined that permanent captivity is in the interests of these animals?

5. How does permanent captivity or death accord with the City's own stated objective of maintaining a healthy, sustainable, free-ranging baboon population?

6. How was the evidence and input provided by the Baboon Advisory Group incorporated into the final decision?

7. Who will be accountable if permanent captivity fails to resolve the underlying causes of conflict?

RESPONSE: *All of the above have been responded to in writing multiple times. These remain as public record in the various Comments-Response Reports that are available and which have been sent directly to the GGST and SAFCEI.*

It is reiterated again that the primary driver of the extreme urban wildlife conflict in Simon's Town is the lack of available resource rich low-lying natural habitat for these two troops. WAPFSA on behalf of its members has independently stated that there are what WAPFSA call three core environmental modules that baboons require. One of these as stated by WAPFSA is "Foraging Topography: Baboons inherently prefer low-lying land with rich soils and high primary productivity for their daily food search". How can WAPFSA and its members motivate for two troops to remain where this core environmental module is insufficient and will as a result lock them into ongoing urban conflict?

The Action Plan is also clear, that there will always be some overlap between urban areas and baboon troops and it makes a clear statement with regards a reasonable expectation by the authorities that there must be public tolerance going forward towards baboon presence at times in their neighbourhoods. This does not however include accepting the return of the levels of urban conflict and poor welfare outcomes that have been allowed for so long in Simon's Town. The Action Plan is equally clear that no new splinter/breakaway/fission groups of baboons will be allowed to re-establish permanency in areas where there is insufficient low-lying resource rich habitat, including Simon's Town. The Action Plan is very clear in this regard.

It is also again recorded that it is wholly irresponsible for any authorities tasked with conservation objectives across multiple species to continue to allow the risk posed by the Seaforth troop to the critically endangered African Penguin colony. This risk was first raised in writing by the managers of the African Penguin colony in 2023 shortly after the establishment of the Seaforth troop. The troop is regularly recorded moving through the colony and exploring nest sites. An unidentified adult female and her juvenile were witnessed consuming penguin eggs before being removed from the area. Allowing this risk to a species of critical conservation concern cannot continue.

<u>The capture permit has not yet been issued – Questions to CapeNature</u>

The City may have approved its management plan and constructed the Urban Wildlife Centre, but neither of those steps substitutes for the regulatory approvals required before wild baboons can lawfully be captured, removed, transported and placed into permanent captivity. CapeNature has not yet issued the required capture permit. We therefore ask CapeNature to explain what regulatory requirements remain outstanding and what evidence has been submitted in support of the proposed capture, transport and permanent confinement of these animals.

1. What regulatory requirements remain outstanding before the Waterfall and Seaforth troops may lawfully be captured, transported and placed into permanent captivity?

2. What veterinary protocol, capture methodology and supporting documentation has been submitted to CapeNature for consideration?

RESPONSE: *The application for capturing, transporting and keeping the two troops at the Urban Wildlife Centre is still in process. No decision has been made. All legislative processes are being followed in the evaluation of the submission. No baboons may be captured and transported or held at the Urban Wildlife Centre without a CapeNature Permit.*

What City are we celebrating?

Cape Town has an opportunity to demonstrate that coexistence is more than a principle written into a management plan. It can begin by addressing the human conditions that create conflict, investing in effective waste management, protecting habitat, evaluating management interventions honestly and implementing reasonable alternatives before resorting to the removal of indigenous wildlife.

We respectfully request that the City reconsider the proposed permanent removal and that the institutions copied on this letter take note of the environmental governance, conservation and public participation issues raised above.

RESPONSE: *There is no merit or reasonable argument from a conservation, animal welfare, social, economic or community perspective to allow the current situation in Simon's Town to continue any longer.*

Yours sincerely,

Stefania Falcon

Co-Director

Green Group Simonstown NPC GGST

Contact:

admin@greengroupsimonstown.org