

Cuts on rock lobster fishing in line with court judgment

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) Minister Senzeni Zokwana says he is aware of the challenges that the current determined Total Allowable Catch and Effort (TAC/E) cuts will have on the industry, specifically the fishing communities.



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This follows the department's announcement of the TAC/E for the West Coast Rock Lobster (WCRL) sector for the 2018/19 fishing season, which saw a reduction of the TAC/E from the previous years.

During the 2017/18 fishing season, the TAC/E was determined at 1. 924.08 tons, however, this was challenged by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) in the Western Cape High Court, on the grounds that it is unsustainable and the determination did not follow scientific advice.

The High Court delivered a judgment on 26 September 2018, and declared the determination of the total allowable catch for WCRL for the 2017/18 fishing season to be inconsistent with the Constitution as read with Section 2 of the National Environmental Management Act, Act No. 107 of 1998 and Section 2 of the Marine Living Resources Act (MLRA), and thus invalid.

"For the 2018/19 fishing season, the TAC/E of 1.084 tons has been determined following consultations and

recommendations by the scientific working group, which is a 43.6% reduction when compared to the TAC/E of 1. 924.08 tons determined for the 2017/18 fishing season.

“The 2018/19 TAC/E is in line with the Court Judgement of September 2018, [and] unfortunately, the department’s hand has been forced to neglect other management objectives of the fisheries sector, which centres around addressing socio-economic challenges of the fishing communities, without undermining sustainability aspects of the resources, which is at the centre of the broad government’s agenda, and the department’s implementation of ecosystem approach to fisheries management,” Zokwana explained.

The Minister added that the WCRL resource is managed on the basis of a developed Operation Management Procedure (OPM), which is an agreed set of rules between scientists, managers, right holders and various stakeholders on recovery targets intended to rebuild the stock.

“It is important to understand and distinguish the roles that are played by these parties within their various respective working groups.

“The current reduced TAC/E of 1.084 tons and various effort limitations sets the resource on the recovery target path of 7% by 2025 in relation to the 2006 baseline biomass,” the Minister said.

Transformed economic sectors

He said the department is working tirelessly to drive transformed economic sectors process in a manner that is not disruptive to the competitiveness of the sector, but also ensuring that this transformation is as inclusive as possible.

This, he said, is demonstrated by the recognition of previously marginalised small-scale fishers in South Africa through the amendment of the MLRA in 2014, where government commenced with a small-scale fisheries program whose aim is to establish a new small-scale fishery throughout the coastal communities of South Africa.

This initiative, according to the Minister, has seen over 10 000 individual traditional fishers being recognised as small-scale fishers for the first time in South Africa’s history.

“This, in essence, means that over 200 communities in the four coastal provinces will access marine resources legally for the purpose of participating in the ocean’s economy and for food security.”

During 2018, government has allocated the first 15-year fishing rights to Port Nolloth and Honderklipbaai in the Northern Cape Province, where a total of 103 individually recognised small-scale fishers have been assisted to register two co-operatives for the purpose of receiving economically sustainable 15-year fishing rights.

Over 70 co-operatives to be allocated 15-year fishing rights

Meanwhile, Zokwana announced that for 2019, government is in the process of finalising the allocation of 15-year fishing rights to 75 registered co-operatives, comprising 5.335 small-scale fishers in Eastern Cape; 45 registered co-operatives comprised of 2.184 small-scale fishers in KwaZulu-Natal, and co-operatives comprise of over 2.500 small-scale fishers in Western Cape.

Zokwana explained that through this program, over 10,000 fishers and their families are being empowered and will be in a position to sustain their livelihoods and further contribute the country’s economy.

“It should be our responsibility as the public sector and the private sector to support initiatives of this nature as they stimulate cohesion and the local economy in fishing communities and beyond. This is taking into account that the WCRL is one of the mainstay species of the small-scale sector.

“The 2020 Fishing Rights Allocation Process (FRAP), which was started earlier in 2018, is already trying to address some of the transformation challenges that are facing the commercial fisheries sector in the country.

“In 2019, government will consult widely on key proposals for allocating fishing rights in 2020, to further promote inclusivity, especially for the marginalised communities,” the Minister said.

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