

## The legacy of apartheid

**In the post-apartheid era, South Africa is striving for a less insular and more equitable fisheries policy**

**T**he new South Africa, reborn after the harsh years of apartheid and oppression, has been swept by gusts of change in several areas of its economy and social fabric. One of the many encouraging signs of change is the way the fishing industry is approaching the inevitable restructuring of its institutions and patterns of operation and administration.

For many months before the election of the new democratic government, the fishery sector took the initiative for meaningful dialogue between representatives of all interested parties. This was done through a Fisheries Forum that brought together leaders of groups as disparate as trade unions, large companies, universities, administrators, researchers, politicians and coastal communities.

Some major companies had already instituted their own affirmative action programmes, and radical groups like the trade unions were producing well-reasoned documents advocating policies which would help maintain the profitability of the industry while simultaneously improving the conditions and prospects of its workforce.

This degree of goodwill and readiness to listen to one another are features that bode well for the future. This may surprise foreign observers who have become used to media accounts of tension and occasional violence in some parts of this large and populous country. Members of Parliament and trade unionists who had served time in jail for their political activities were sitting around the table with businessmen and bureaucrats who, if they had not actually supported apartheid, had definitely benefited from the regime. While views differed considerably, all sides displayed a very

genuine interest and willingness to compromise in order to reach workable agreements for the long-term good of the fishing industry and its people.

It would be less than honest to gloss over differences or to play down the difficult and complex nature of the problems faced. Fundamental changes in policy and the sharing of wealth and power cannot come about without some pain or resistance. It is to the credit of the long-established fishing companies that they agree that some changes are necessary, but their view of appropriate change would not go as far or as deep as that of the trade unions or the African National Congress (ANC).

The new government is still debating its fishery policy, but, in its final shape, it is likely to be related to the four objectives the ANC saw for the fishery sector in the run-up to the elections. These were to:

- restructure the industry and its institutions to allow more equitable access to the resource and to introduce community participation, transparency and accountability in decision-making;
- review the system of quota allocation to promote security and stability in the industry;
- promote the management of stocks on a sustainable yield basis and the development of new species and techniques for harvesting and culture;
- improve the quality of life in fishing communities by increasing employment opportunities, and improving wages, health, safety and job security.

**W**hile the policy debate is continuing, the government and the industry are tackling some serious injustices being currently faced. Access to resources is a major concern for disadvantaged groups.

These include the coastal fishing communities, who believe that they have been excluded by past governments which favoured the large white-owned fishing companies. The Quota Board regularly granted large quotas to the big companies, and very little to the coastal fishermen.

Among the arguments used by the Quota Board was the one that coastal fishermen were not equipped to harvest offshore stocks. This was partly true since they lacked suitable boats, gear and fish-handling facilities. Coastal communities also felt that affluent, recreational fishermen were permitted too much access to lobster fishing around their villages.

One issue that crystallized much of the dissatisfaction was the ban on long-lining for hake. Most of the South African hake catch is taken by large bottom-trawlers. Small boats could catch some by using lines, but this was prohibited on the rationale that longlining would be harmful to the stock of both hake and kingklip. For readers unfamiliar with fishing techniques, it should be said that

the claim sounded absurd to North Atlantic fishermen and scientists who would tend to say the reverse long-lining is a passive method of fishing, but bottom-trawling could be harmful to stocks if allowed without strict controls.

South Africa's small-scale fishermen (mostly black or coloured) felt that the ban on long-lining was just another form of discrimination which used fallacious arguments to give it an apparently scientific rationale.

Tuna pole-and-line fishermen were particularly hurt by the ban. They fished for seven months of the year for tuna, but had to tie up and lose income the rest of the year because they were not permitted to fish for hake.

#### **Insignificant catch**

Also, the amount of hake which the tuna boats could catch by long-lining would be insignificant, compared to the enormous hake catch taken by the trawler fleet. So, poor, hard-working fishermen were deprived of income for five months of each year in order to make trawling companies even more profitable.

So, one of the first interventions of the new government in the fishery sector was to authorize a feasibility study on long-lining for hake. This was agreed to, although there was enough external evidence from many other fishing

countries that the ban on long-lining was unjustified.

**A** Hake Long-lining Management Committee had been established in 1992, and the issue was discussed at a workshop in Stellenbosch in February 1994. Two areas of research were identified. One was on operations, headed by David Japp of the Sea Fisheries Research Institute, and Doug Butterworth of the University of Cape Town.

The other was on the economics, headed by Jacques van Zyl of Sea Fisheries. This group is now measuring and comparing the economic and socio-economic benefits of long-lining with trawling.

The Japp-Butterworth group has just completed its study of the selectivity of long-line operations, compared with trawling. This report will go to the Hake Long-lining Committee and into public forums for informed debate.

The feasibility study operations involved 40 tuna boats, which were allowed to catch up to 30 tonnes of hake each, and four large company boats which were allocated study quotas of up to 1,200 tonnes each.

To protect other species, particularly kingklip, a limit of 20 per cent by-catch was placed on the operations. Half of this was for kingklip and the other half for line-fish and shark.

Now that part of the total study is complete, it will be interesting to note the results of the feasibility trials, and to obtain views and analyses from scientists and fishermen.

The assessment of foreign fishery scientists will also be useful to be placed alongside the rather insular views of those within South Africa who had little external contact with other fishery bodies during the apartheid years.

Hopefully, these and other approaches to fishery issues in South Africa will eventually result in the establishment of a more just and equitable administration of fisheries for the benefit of all of South Africa's peoples. ♣

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