

No survey may mean no fish exports

Export revenues of nearly R3bn and as many as 9,000 jobs could be lost if the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries fails to complete a critical survey of fish stocks in South African waters.



After months of delays, the department now seems dependent on a lifeline from the private sector if the survey is to be completed before the end of the month.

Without the results of the survey, the holders of fishing rights could be shut out of foreign markets and even banned from exporting fish to Europe, America and Australia.

The department has not said how it plans to resolve this situation.

The survey ship, *SAS Africana*, which was to have undertaken the survey is in dock for repairs that could take several months to complete, according to the department.

Hake is by far the most valuable fish resource in South African waters and is exported to the European Union, the US and Australia, according to the Marine Stewardship Council.

Consumers in developed countries are particularly concerned about the sustainability of fishing and, according to the council, nearly a quarter of shoppers around the world recognise its eco-label.

Job losses loom

Fishing industry expert Shaheen Moola said the failure to quantify South Africa's hake stocks would not only mean a loss of certification from the council but could also affect between 5,000 and 9,000 jobs in the fishing sector. He said associated industries are also at risk of severe job shedding.

Moola said Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson had not met representatives of the fishing industry since her appointment in June 2009.

"And the minister's advisers have little knowledge of the fishing industry," said Moola.

He was especially critical of the appointment of Greta Apelgren-Narkedien, a former head of the Northern Cape department of social development, as deputy director-general for fisheries, saying she had no experience of the industry.

SA Deep Sea Trawling Industry Association spokesman Roy Ross said there would be adverse consequences if the survey were delayed but the industry had contingency plans.

A vessel owned by a private fishing company has reportedly been offered to the department in a bid to get the survey done.

Fisheries spokesman Lionel Adendorf said that though he was not aware of the details, an agreement to conduct the survey had been reached with a private company.

"The vessel has been identified and we have assembled a crew from [the department's] staff," said Adendorf.

He, however, could not say when the survey would be undertaken.

Adendorf said that the department had "processes in place to deal with this matter" and an announcement would be made soon.

Source: *The Times* via I-Net Bridge

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