

# Inland fishing industry needs effective guidelines

The Water Research Commission (WRC) has welcomed the launch of a new fishing app during the celebration of the World Fisheries Day on Saturday, 21 November 2015 in Eastern Cape and congratulated Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, Senzeni Zokwana, for creating awareness in rural communities and the local fishing industry on existing opportunities to fight poverty and create jobs through fishing.



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According to a recent WRC study, the absence of an equitable inland fishing governance framework with defined use rights has resulted in growing unmanaged and unsustainable fishing practices, conflicts between resource users, and the perpetuation of past exclusion of rural communities from livelihood and economic opportunities. In response to this problem, the WRC launched a directed research project to provide a knowledge base to inform the development of policy and institutional arrangements for inland fishery governance.

If South Africa intends to establish an industry based on inland fisheries, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) will need to draw up a clear policy to manage and regulate the country's resources. A report published by the WRC on the sustainable use of inland fisheries in South Africa will provide guidelines which will assist the DAFF in establishing appropriate policies.

## Sustainable uses

In January 2015, the WRC completed a four-year scoping study on the sustainable use of inland fisheries in South Africa. The report finds there are three sustainable uses for inland fisheries in the country - recreational fishing, subsistence fishing and commercial fishing.

As the three activities compete for resources, this could lead to conflict if property rights are not explicitly recognised and enforced. "If the rules of the game are not clear, it could lead to conflict, and this needs to be clarified," says Dr Gerhard Backeberg, executive manager of Water Utilisation in Agriculture at the WRC.

Recreational fishing, with its strong links to the tourism industry, is by far the most economically viable option for growing the inland fisheries industry. It is estimated that more than 1,5 million people are involved in recreational angling in South Africa. Angling is recognised and organised as a sport through official sports bodies. A 2007 study by the SA Deep Sea Angling Association estimates that an average affiliated angler spent around R7,500 per year on fishing and the economic impact of these anglers was about R900m per year. Since the 1990s, however, the number of subsistence fishers has increased.

## **Improved food security**

With the evidence contained in the baseline and scoping report, Backeberg is convinced that subsistence fishing can certainly provide improved food security and better livelihoods for many communities, but increasing levels of conflict between recreational anglers and communities fishing for their livelihoods can lead to problems.

"As documented in the report, the conflict between recreational fishers and subsistence fishers already come to a head at specific dams, and the authorities at provincial or national level will have to intervene. Some way of co-existence will have to be found," says Backeberg. "Those who are better organised will always win and it seems to be the recreational fishers, but there are others, in particular subsistence fishers, who need to be given opportunities to improve livelihoods," he says.

The government's role is to clarify access rights, establish effective regulations and guidelines for co-management and governance of inland fisheries. Without a clear policy and framework, the competition for the limited resources might lead to increasing problems, not only for the communities making a living from fishing, but also for the country's natural resources and biodiversity.

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