

Mayekiso on the line

REFLECTING ON THE THE LAST FIVE YEARS IN FISHING INDUSTRY

Monde Mayekiso, deputy director general in the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, and head of Marine and Coastal Management, reflects on the successes and failures of the past five years.

The challenge of managing fisheries in South Africa hasn't got any easier. Although MCM has made admirable progress with allocating long-term fishing rights in the commercial fisheries and building capacity in various areas, in every sphere of our work - from resource management to fisheries compliance and scientific research - there are fundamental and very serious issues to be resolved.

The most pressing challenge is financial. The management of the Marine Living Resources Fund (MLRF) has come under intense scrutiny over the past few months and MCM is currently focusing a lot of time and energy on addressing the future management of the Fund.

Financial uncertainty strains every aspect of our organisation and it is imperative that we resolve the difficulties associated with the management of the MLRF as soon as possible.

A source of financial difficulty is the operation of our fleet of research and environmental protection vessels. Anyone who has owned a ship will understand how costly it is to keep a vessel operational; we are currently faced with the challenge of keeping four patrol vessels and a number of research vessels at sea and working.

However, I believe that the financial strain of operating our protection vessels should not obscure the fact that we have, over the past five years, succeeded in building and equipping these vessels to our specifications.

Tackling law enforcement

Whereas five years ago we undertook virtually no fisheries patrols, today we are better equipped than ever before to tackle the issue of IUU fishing within our EEZ and our offshore islands.

Similarly, our law enforcement officials have often been criticised for a lack of effectiveness, but today they are working better than ever with other law enforcement agencies, including the Directorate of Special Operations (the Scorpions), SARS and the SAPS. Moreover, we have established strong links with other countries involved in the fight against IUU fishing. Over the past five years we have successfully conducted joint fisheries patrols with our neighbours in Mozambique, Tanzania, Namibia and Angola, and worked with Australia to bring poachers in the Southern Ocean to book.

There have, of course, been disappointments in the area of fisheries compliance. Clearly, we have failed to get on top of the abalone poaching problem and this failure has had very serious ramifications for the legal abalone fishery where TACs continue to decline.

In the realm of science, there have also been a number of ups and downs. On the up side, South Africa is one of the first countries



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in the world to move away from a single-species approach to fisheries management towards an ecosystems approach (EAF). Essentially EAF is a more holistic system of management; its key objective is the sustainable use of the whole system and not just targeted species.

For the first time, the operational management procedure (OMP) that is being developed for the small pelagic fishery will take EAF principles into account.

Aquaculture research

Other highlights on the scientific front are the strides we are making in aquaculture research (thanks in part to new funding from the Department of Science and Technology) and the imminent replacement of the

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research ship, *Sardinops*, with a new, purpose-built inshore sampling vessel.

On the down side, our research output has been less than intended over the past five years, largely as a result of capacity constraints, financial constraints and the fact that our scientific staff complement is characterised by a new, less experienced cohort and an old cohort, which is moving closer to retirement.

We generally lack mid-career professionals in the age category 35 to 45, a factor that prevents us from conducting as much research as we would like and frustrates us in our bid to train and mentor the younger cohort of scientists

Movement of fish stocks

The steady movement of fish stocks away from the traditional fishing areas on the west coast has intensified over the past five years. This trend is alarming because it threatens the livelihoods of large numbers of people living on the west coast.

Another cause of concern is the state of the hake resource, the backbone of our industrial fishing industry. Hake stocks are clearly under pressure and the Department welcomes the initiatives of the fishing industry to turn this situation around.

Another disappointment of the past five years is the continued failure of the international community to take the necessary steps to curb IUU fishing.

In my view, the international community has also failed to effectively manage migratory stocks, such as tunas, through regional fisheries organisations.

In part, this is because the industrialised nations of the northern hemisphere, that operate large and well equipped distant water fleets, have failed to honour the legitimate claims by developing nations who wish to gain access to those stocks.

Subsistence fishing

But if we are to look outwards, we must also look inwards. There are areas that MCM has historically not dealt with effectively and the truth is we continue to under perform in these areas.

One example is the management of the subsistence fisheries. As an organisation we have neglected the subsistence fisheries, possibly because we have been so intent on resolving the allocation of rights in the commercial fisheries.

Although the process of formulating a policy for the management of small scale and subsistence fisheries is now underway, we still have limited capacity to research or monitor these fisheries. In the Eastern Cape, for example, subsistence fisheries are largely unregulated, while in KwaZulu-Natal, MCM's monitoring and control responsibilities are out-sourced to Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife.

Although that is a valuable relationship, ideally we should not be managing the subsistence fisheries on the east coast at arms length.

BCLME Involvement

To conclude on a positive note, South Africa's involvement in the Benguela Current (BCLME) Programme, and the signing of an agreement last year to establish the Benguela Current Commission, were undoubtedly a highlight of the five-year period.

The BCLME Programme provided a valuable opportunity for South African scientists and managers to become involved in regional management issues and to develop relationships with our neighbouring countries, Namibia and Angola.

The Benguela Current Commission will give our country the opportunity to take this cooperation to a new level, allowing us to negotiate constructively around management issues like shared fish stocks and environmental degradation.

We hope that the regional cooperation that has been a hallmark of the BCLME Programme is replicated on the east coast of Africa, through our country's imminent participation in the Agulhas Small Currents Large Marine Ecosystem Programme.



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