

Vital to save endangered species, ease pressure on fish stocks, writes Hopewell Radebe

SA moves to nurture aquaculture sector

ABALONE farming is becoming a fast-growing business opportunity in the aquaculture industry as marine resources in the wild dwindle. There is a growing need for fish as human populations and international demand for the protein rise.

The South African government has been encouraging fish farming as part of the development of the country's aquaculture sector, as well as to protect fish species from overfishing due to Asian market demand.

Rudi van Niekerk, investment adviser at Agri-Vie, the sub-Saharan food and agribusiness private equity fund, says investing in sustainable abalone projects is vital to saving endangered species and easing the pressure on global marine resources.

Agriculture Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson's spokeswoman, Palesa Mokomele, says abalone farms have created the majority of direct new jobs in the aquaculture sector — a total of 1,219 last year.

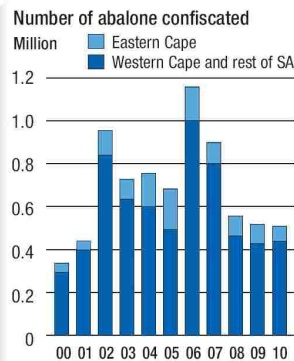
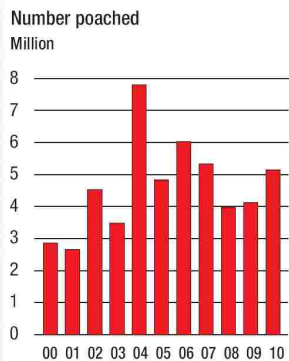
In 2011, 30 marine aquaculture farms were operational, of which 14 were abalone farms in the Western Cape (11), Eastern Cape (1) and Northern Cape (2).

Ms Mokomele says the

ABALONE IN PERIL

Stock status: depleted/heavily depleted

Fishing pressure: heavy



- Of the total of 30 marine aquaculture farms in SA, 14 are abalone farms
- The abalone industry exported 1036 tons of abalone in 2011 valued at R357m (55% of the total aquaculture production)
- The industry created the majority of direct jobs totalling 1219
- The aquaculture production level for 2011 was 4769 tons
- SA contributes less than 1% of Africa's total production of 56 million tons

Graphic: RUBY-GAY Source: STATUS OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN MARINE FISHERY RESOURCES 2012

abalone industry contributed 55% of total aquaculture production in 2011. In addition, its sales represented 94% of the entire aquaculture sector.

Working with the Department of Trade and Industry, the fisheries unit of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry established the Aquaculture Development and Enhancement Programme — a funding incentive aimed at attracting new entrants into the

fish-farming business to improve competitiveness in the sector.

According to the agriculture department, two new black businesses were recently granted rights for abalone farming. These farms have also been linked to the aquaculture development programme.

The fisheries sector includes wild-capture fisheries across commercial, recreational and small-scale fisheries as well as aquaculture, which is considered

to be an underdeveloped sector.

Ms Mokomele says South African abalone species are rated among the best in export markets. As a result, abalone producers have developed their own niche markets in countries such as China, Hong Kong, Japan, Thailand, Taiwan, Singapore and Malaysia.

The sector exported 1,036 tons in 2011, with a value of about R357m out of the total R379m fish exports by SA.

Through the aquaculture development and enhancement programme, the department argues, new businesses are being developed and supported, and existing businesses are being encouraged to expand “in order to increase their ability to absorb more jobs”.

The programme funds primary aquaculture, secondary (processing) operations and ancillary operations supporting the sector such as aquatic health services.

Ms Mokomele says the aquaculture sector has been prioritised due to declining wild stocks. Marine aquaculture species include dusky kob, abalone, Pacific oyster, Mediterranean mussel, black mussel, and two seaweed species — all commercial species.

Marine species being researched include white stumpnose, spotted grunter, yellowbelly rock cod, Atlantic salmon, south coast sea urchin, South African scallop, bloodworm and sea cucumbers. In addition, there is a freshwater aquaculture development programme which includes species such as trout, catfish, tilapia, carp, Atlantic salmon, marron crayfish and largemouth bass.

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