

**ABALONE FUELS GROWTH:** In 2011 exports of cultured perlemoen totalled about R379m and created 1 219 jobs

# AQUACULTURE SECTOR BOOMS

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CONSUMER REPORTER

THE AQUACULTURE industry in the Western Cape is growing, particularly in the abalone sector, with exports worth about R379 million creating jobs for 1 219 workers.

But the over-poaching of abalone could see the species wiped out in the wild.

Fifty-five percent of abalone sold comes from the cultured abalone industry sector with the highest number of farms in the Western Cape.

This is according to 2011 figures supplied by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. The department said of a total of 30 marine aquaculture farms, 14 grew abalone, 11 in the Western Cape. There was one farm in the Eastern Cape and two in the Northern Cape.

Other aquaculture farms include four fin-fish farms, three mussel farms and 10 oyster farms.

Carol Moses, acting spokeswoman for the department's fisheries branch, said abalone farming had contributed 55 percent of total aquaculture production in 2011, with an increase in sales of 0.6 percent to R379m, which represented 94 percent of the sector.

"With regard to export markets, the South African abalone species is rated among the best species. Abalone producers have also 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."

Rudi van Niekerk, investment adviser at Agri-Vie, the sub-Saharan



## NICHE MARKET

South Africa is one of the biggest producers of abalone outside Asia

private equity fund investing in food and agribusiness and a principal shareholder in HIK Abalone Farms, said investments in sustainable abalone projects were vital to saving the endangered species and alleviating the pressure on global natural fish resources.

Louise Jansen, executive director at HIK, said the past two decades had seen phenomenal increases in the amount of cultured abalone product entering the markets, particularly in Asia.

"In South Africa alone, abalone production from aquaculture facilities has increased from zero in the 1990s to an estimated current level of about

1 200 tons, making South Africa one of the biggest producers of abalone outside Asia. Most farms are expanding production and the industry is set to grow to at least 5 000 tons in the next 10 years."

Jansen said, however, that illegal poaching was obliterating some populations of wild abalone.

Moses said the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, working with the Department of Trade and Industry, had developed the Aquaculture Development and Enhancement Programme, a funding incentive aimed at attracting new entrants and improving the competitiveness of the

sector. The programme funds primary aquaculture operations, secondary (processing) and other ancillary operations.

According to the 2013 edition of Western Cape Business, the West Coast District municipality has identified aquaculture as a key investment sector with a R40m investment in a local fishing farm to reach a production capacity of 300 tons. An R18m fish-farming project is also being established in Velddrif.

Farms producing Atlantic salmon, cob and seaweed are three land-based projects under review.

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