



RESPONSIBLE FISHERIES
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RFA Press Release on Horse Mackerel (Final)

The Responsible Fisheries Alliance (RFA), a partnership between environmental NGOs, WWF South Africa and BirdLife South Africa, and five major fishing companies, namely Irvin & Johnson (I&J), Oceana Group, Pioneer Fishing, Sea Harvest and Viking Fishing, is calling on the Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) to reconsider the recent decision to allocate an additional 8000 tonnes of experimental quota in the horse mackerel fishery.

Although the causes are not well understood, current indications suggest that there is a need for a cautionary approach with regards to the horse mackerel resource. Catch per unit effort (a standardised measure for measuring fisheries) has been unexpectedly low since 2014 with the reasons for this dramatic drop in catches still unclear. Due to this decline in resource availability, of the 58 000 tonnes of allowable catch in 2015, only 12 433 tonnes were caught across all sectors. This resulted in the species being downgraded to Orange on WWF's Southern African Sustainable Initiative (SASSI) list.

While the RFA is supportive of the Department's efforts to identify additional socio-economic opportunities in the fisheries sector, this must be done within the constraints of ecologically sustainable and precautionary limits, as prescribed by the Marine Living Resources Act. To date, no research has been done to suggest that additional horse mackerel could be sustainably harvested in this fishery, nor has there been an explanation provided by the Department as to the objective, approach, specifications or restrictions of the proposed experiment. At present the experimental right is also not subject to the effort restrictions that have been placed on the existing rights-holders as a result of concerns around the status of the resource.

Given the uncertainty surrounding the status of this resource, responsible fisheries management requires that we employ a precautionary approach to manage this valuable fishery. The allocation of an additional 8000 tonnes, over and above the current Total Allowable Catch and without any effort limitations, is irrational and threatens not just the ecological status of the fishery but the livelihoods of those who are involved in the fishery at present.

As a signatory to the 2002 Implementation Plan for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, South Africa has made global commitments to implementing an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) across all of its fisheries. Globally, the EAF is considered the main reference framework for responsibly managing fisheries and implementing the principles of sustainable development. As such the approach requires a science-based, participative and transparent approach to decision-making and recognizes the need to take account of uncertainty by applying a precautionary approach to protect the ecosystem in cases where science is unclear.

The RFA was founded with the goal of promoting an EAF in the belief that healthier marine ecosystems will continue to provide more ecological, social and economic benefits to society for

longer. The RFA believes the Department's decision must apply the key principles of the EAF. As such the Alliance members do not support the allocation of this experimental right until it is shown to be ecologically sustainable and scientifically justified and that the awarding of such a right follows a transparent and consultative process.