

# There's big money in fishing and big corruption

By James Lorimer MP – DA Shadow Minister of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries

There's big money in fishing and big corruption, and the way the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) has failed to deal with it is emblematic of its failures in many other areas.

The ANC's National Development Plan (NDP), to which it pays only sporadic fealty, speaks of the importance of marine fisheries for coastal communities. And that's correct, and it follows from that, that coastal communities should be the major beneficiaries of fishing rights.

So why then, does somebody in Boksburg get a crayfish right? Why do people with no disenable connection to the sea suddenly get a hake quota? They don't have a boat, they don't have a factory, but what they have is BEE credentials. And we all know that not just any Black person gets BEE, you have to have a family connection to the ANC faction in power or you have to be important in the party.

All the promises to investigate previous quota allocations, for example in the 2016 FRAP process have got nowhere, those bizarre allocations remain unchanged.

Now we are heading for a major new fishing rights allocation process, the FRAP 2021. What is there in this budget that can give us some hope that the process will be any different if not worse?

Now there's a process to appoint a new Deputy Director-General of the Department. But there's no indication as to who is in the running. What is likely, based on past performance, is that it will be somebody who is compliant with and perhaps even assists the steering of juicy quotas to important ANC comrades.

The National Development Plan also acknowledges that fish is a finite resource. All the more reason that rights should be focused on coastal communities and on where they provide the most jobs, in the major fishing companies which provide high numbers of jobs in the entire value chain. Rights should not be handed out as rewards to ANC friends who will sell them to the companies that do have boats, after taking a handsome profit.

Fisheries was once a great asset. The ANC government has made it a piggy bank. Remember the patrol boat fleet we used to have? Remember the research capacity we used to have? There are still a number of good scientists struggling against the odds, but it is difficult to get anything implemented. The question becomes, even if the capacity is going to be restored, how will it be done when there is no more money?

That may seem a harsh question, but consider the robberies of confiscated abalone from government stores. They've been robbed seven times that we know of. It seems there've been consequences for only two people.

Where it has not been crooked, the Department has failed because it tried to impose ANC ideologies onto sectors like small scale fishers and their forcing into co-operatives. Co-operative success stories are

as rare in our fishing communities as they were in the Soviet Union. One or two Potemkin examples and the rest are on a scale from disaster to unsustainable.

This enthusiasm for interference has extended to aquaculture, which has been disappointing as a creator of value and jobs. The Department tried unsuccessfully to start small businesses because the ANC cannot grasp that the complexities of starting a business cannot be successfully negotiated by the government, and that means any government, not least one that is proving so unsuccessful at achieving even the basics of governance. Rather than trying to dictate every participant and every outcome, government should stand back and clear the way for business to succeed. Government needs to have an eye on the big picture, growth, preservation and success, rather than merely enforcing arcane rules.

Here's an example. South African aquaculture grown abalone is highly prized in the Chinese market. But exports have had huge difficulty because of the pandemic and Hong Kong politics. So logically, should we not be adding abalone to restaurant menus in South Africa as an added attraction when tourism resumes? Scan the list of South African seafood restaurants, and I don't believe that even one offers abalone as a dish. Why? Because the regulations are too onerous. If the department was really focused on supporting the South African industry, it would find a way to take the regulatory burden off individual restaurants, not just bluntly enforce unworkable rules.

The Honourable Minister has made some encouraging changes to this portfolio, she has come in as a new broom, but FRAP is where her tenure will be judged. Another hotly disputed, obviously corrupt process and the entire system will be deprived of legitimacy. We've seen what happens to illegitimate systems, the rules get ignored, everybody joins in the plunder and the resource disappears. To succeed there will have to be big changes in the ways the department operates.

Stuck as it is with a fifty-eight-year-old National Democratic Revolution as an unvariable lodestar, hopes are not high that the ANC will change. Innovation is not something it does.