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## Sunday Views

Write to the Weekend Argus editor at PO Box 56, Cape Town, 8000, e-mail wkletters@inl.co.za or fax 021 488 4793. A full address and daytime telephone number are required. The editor reserves the right to edit or reject.

# Flawed interim policy offers little relief to fishers

THERE are deep flaws in the management of the interim relief dispensation for small-scale fishers that not only threaten their livelihood but also the sustainability of the West Coast rock lobster, or kreef.

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is mismanaging this process, and we at the Masifundise Development Trust have called for the urgent intervention of the relevant National Assembly committee.

When the government adopted long-term fishing policies in 2005, it made no provision for small-scale fishers. In 2006, Masifundise (advocating social, economic and environmental justice in the small-scale fisheries sector), Coastal Links and the African Farmers' Association of SA approached the Equality Court. The court ruled that a new policy must be developed and an interim relief package for small-scale fishers formulated and implemented. This was meant to be a short-term solution, but has been in place for six years because of the delay in finalising the policy.

The interim relief dispensation is still in place even though the policy was adopted by the cabinet last May.

Since its inception, the interim

dispensation has been plagued with challenges. Catches are not properly monitored and recorded and we suspect instances of fraud.

Over the years we have had several engagements with the department about these flaws, but no corrective action has been taken.

Most of the beneficiaries of the interim dispensation are members of Coastal Links, which works in close partnership with Masifundise.

Coastal Links members have lost faith in the monitoring system as they experience the flaws daily. We have studied monitoring reports and found many shortcomings and inaccuracies. The absence of an effective monitoring system resulted in the suspension of the 2011/12 West Coast rock lobster interim relief season as the resource was being unsustainably harvested in some areas because of insufficient controls.

The Hawks investigated, and the understanding was that it would produce a report highlighting problems and allowing for a solution to found. This did not materialise.

Masifundise and the department embarked on a similar process for the department to put measures in place for the current interim relief 7 season.

The key challenges, identified for interim relief 6 were: reported overcatching by some fishers; figures on the monitoring slips being changed (for instance, the department's slip indicates 4kg and the buyer's copy indicates 40kg); fishers not being given records of their catch, thus not knowing whether they have over-caught or still have an allocation remaining; and being unable to defend themselves against allegations of overcatching; incorrect record keeping; and an absence of records of who the lobster was sold to, making it easy for the lobster to enter the black market. Most of these problems have not been addressed.

Last month, the department alerted Masifundise to concerns about overcatching in the most recent catch data. For instance, a monitor at Paternoster allowed four fishers (all on the "overcaught" list) to land a combined 107kg of lobster on a Sunday, when harvesting on weekends is not permitted.

Another fisher from the same area overcaught by 12kg on December 27, yet the monitor allowed him to land an additional 177kg from three landings. A sum of 41 slips (all recorded as being from Paternoster) list buyers as

"Unknown". This accounts for 2 492kg of lobster, or 76 percent of the overcatch for that area, all of which could easily have made its way on to the black market.

There are many more examples. On February 25, department officials stated their intention to close the West Coast rock lobster season as soon as the total allowable catch for interim relief (251 tons) was reached, regardless of where the lobster was caught and who had reached their allocation.

For many, the season was cut short as poor administration meant permits came a month or more after the season opened. Furthermore, the department indicated that it planned to cancel the 205 interim relief permits.

Allowing overcatching to continue unchecked will have a negative effect West Coast rock lobster stocks.

We emphasise our deep concern that the early closure of the lobster season would unfairly punish the fishers who are yet to catch their quota.

The livelihoods of struggling fishers and the sustainability of our fishing stock are at stake.

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Masifundise Development Trust