

9 February 2026

For Attention:

President Cyril Ramaphosa

Presidency of the Republic of South Africa

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Minister Willie Aucamp

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And Director of Small-scale Fisheries Management

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CC:

Portfolio Committee on Forestry, Fisheries and Environment

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Select Committee on Agriculture, Land Reform and Mineral Resources

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LETTER OF DEMAND: DFPE LINEFISH DECISION TO STARVE SMALL-SCALE FISHING COMMUNITIES

Dear President Ramaphosa, Minister Aucamp and the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment,

Last Monday (2 February), we were informed of your decision on the allocation of the 2026–2027 Traditional Linefish. That decision cuts our access to the sea as small-scale fisheries by slashing our vessel allocations from 565 boats to just 77 nationwide. We are shocked, angry, and deeply alarmed.

Let us be clear: this decision places our lives, livelihoods and our communities in immediate danger.

We are traditional fishers. After 1994, we have fought and continue to fight to have our sector recognised and protected. Under apartheid, we were criminalised, marginalised and forcibly removed from our resources that we live from. More than 30 years into democracy, after fighting for the Small-Scale Fisheries Policy and for recognition as rights holders, we are still being treated as if we do not matter.

We are overlooked. We are disrespected. We are disregarded.

In 2007, the Kenneth George court order gave us hope. It clearly instructed the Minister to develop and implement a framework that must accommodate the **socio-economic rights of traditional and small-scale fishers** and ensure **equitable access to marine resources**. In 2012, when the Small-Scale Fisheries Policy was gazetted and the roll-out of implementation began, we believed that historic injustices would finally be addressed.

This linefish decision proved otherwise.

It violates our constitutional rights to food, livelihood, culture and dignity. Traditional linefish is the backbone of our communities. Thousands of fishers, including women and youth, depend on this resource for survival. It feeds our families year-round. Cutting our TAE means fewer days at sea, no income for hundreds of households and our children going to bed hungry.

In cooperatives with over 100 members, how are we expected to decide who gets to go to sea with one boat and who must stay at home without work? This decision forces fishers to turn against one another, creates deep division within communities, and places an impossible burden on cooperatives. The damage this will cause, socially, economically and emotionally will be long-lasting and entirely avoidable.

Our boats carry generations of history across these waters, used by our great-grandmothers, and great-grandfathers long before these decisions. Why are you erasing our rights, our culture, and our way of life? Is it not your duty to protect them?

This decision directly undermines the purpose and promise of the Small-Scale Fisheries Policy. It is condemning the sector to death and extinction.

How is it acceptable in a country where we are facing rising food prices, deep poverty, climate disasters, and widespread hunger? We are seeing increasing malnutrition in our communities and your response is to take away our primary source of food.

How can this possibly be justified?

We are constantly told that these cuts are about 'sustainability.' As fishers whose lives and communities depend on linefish, we reject this. If sustainability were truly the goal, the commercial sector would not dominate access to the resource, and the recreational sector would not remain completely uncapped, harvesting without any TAE. You continue to perpetrate injustice, catering for the rich and powerful by taking away from the poor.

Time and again, it is us who are expected to sacrifice. This is not fair, neutral or responsible resource management. This is a deliberate choice that prioritises profit and privilege over food security, livelihoods and human dignity.

We cannot go on like this.

We therefore demand the following:

1. **Immediate review and reversal of the 2026–2027 Traditional Linefish TAE decision**
The current allocation is unsustainable, unjust, and made without meaningful consultation. It must be urgently reconsidered with the direct involvement of affected fishing communities.
2. **A proper process of engagement with the Small-Scale Fisheries sector to determine a fair and equitable TAE.** The Department must meaningfully consult and engage directly with affected small-scale fishing communities to arrive at a linefish allocation that is fair, transparent and equitable. Decisions affecting our livelihoods cannot be imposed without our participation and informed input.
3. **A transparent review and redistribution of commercial sector allocations**
The current structure overwhelmingly favours large commercial interests at the expense of food security, livelihoods, and local economic development.
4. **Immediate caps on recreational fishing effort in the Traditional Linefish sector**
Unlimited recreational access alongside drastic cuts to small-scale fishers is irrational, inequitable, and undermines any claim to sustainability.
5. **An independent investigation into how this decision was made and who must be held accountable.** This decision has caused real harm, fear, and instability in our communities. Officials have a duty to act lawfully and in the best interests of small-scale fishers. If negligence, misconduct, or failure to uphold legal and policy obligations is found, disciplinary action must follow.
6. **Exemption granted if the TAE is not reconsidered before permit expiry.** Current linefish permits expire on 28 February 2026. If the Department does not reconsider and correct this decision before that date, it must grant an immediate exemption allowing all small-scale fishers with valid vessel survey certificates to continue fishing from 1 March 2026 until the allocation is revised.

Conclusion

Fishing is not just a job. It is our culture, our identity and intergenerational knowledge passed down over generations. When our access to the sea is taken away, we lose more than income, we lose dignity, heritage and the ability to provide for and teach the next generation. Protecting linefish must go hand in hand with protecting the people who have depended on this resource for generations.

Without fair access and redistribution, there can be no sustainability, no food security, and no future for small-scale fishing communities in South Africa.

We demand a written response within five (5) days of receipt of this letter. Should the Department fail to respond or take corrective action within this period, we will take further legal and public actions.

We urge you to reverse this decision and act before more harm is done.

Signed by the following organisations in the Small-scale fishing sector:

1. *Coastal Links South Africa*
2. *Westcoast Small Scale Fishers Forum*
3. *St. Helena Bay Fishing Community Forum*
4. *SSF WC REPRESENTATIVE FORUM*
5. *OVERBERG COLLECTIVE FORUM*
6. *South Africa United Fishing Front (SAUFF)*
7. *Peterson Kok Griqua Royal House*
8. *Mitchells plain fishing Forum*
9. *Masifundise*
10. *ABALOB*

Signed by the following SSF Co-operatives:

NORTHERN CAPE

1. *Aukotowa Fisheries Primary Co-operative*
2. *Longtime Hondeklipbaai Primary Cooperative*

WESTERN CAPE

3. *Amalula Fishing Primary (Laingville)*
4. *Atlantis Small Scale Fishers*
5. *Awegiyonke SSF Cooperative*
6. *Biesiebos Fishing Primary Co-operative Limited*
7. *Buffelsjag Baai Seawhale Fishing Primary Co-operative Limited*
8. *Celubomi Primary Co-operative*
9. *Coast to Coast Primary Fishing Co-op*
10. *Elandsbay Fishing Primary*
11. *Grassy Park Fishing Primary Co-operative*
12. *Hangberg York Fishing Primary*
13. *Hanover Fishing Community Primary Co-op*
14. *Harries Baai Fishing Primary Co-operative*
15. *Hlanganani Langa Fishing Primary Co-operative Limited*
16. *Hopefield Fishing Primary*
17. *Iron Fountain Fishing Primary (Yzerfontein)*
18. *Kleinmond Protea Small-Scale Primary Co-operative Limited*
19. *Kraaifontein Co-op*
20. *Lacastha Fishing Primary (Darling)*
21. *Lambertsbay Fishing Primary*
22. *Langebaan Lagoon Development Primary*
23. *Lighthouse Fishing Primary (Doringbay)*
24. *Lh Black Marlin Co-operative*
25. *Mamre Enterprise Fishing Primary*
26. *Mazul'az'aythole Primary Co-operative*
27. *Mooi Uitsig – Phambili Fishing Primary Co-operative Limited*
28. *Mount Pleasant Ocean Solution Fishing Primary Co-operative Limited*
29. *Mzamba Small-Scale Fishing Co-op*
30. *Neptune Fishing Primary Co-operative*
31. *Olifantsrivier Fishing Primary (Ebenhaeser)*

32. *Only Fishers Secondary Cooperative*
33. *Paternoster Fishing Primary*
34. *Pelican Fishing Primary (Papendorp)*
35. *Retreat Fishing Community Primary Co-op*
36. *Saldiaz Veeldoelige Primer (Saldanha)*
37. *SLP Small Scale Fishers*
38. *Sonwabe Fishing Cooperative*
39. *Stanford Village Fisheries Primary Co-operative Limited*
40. *Steenbergs Cove Multipurpose Fishing Primary*
41. *Stompneus Sandy Point Fishing Primary*
42. *Strand Small Scale Fishers Co-operative*
43. *Stuisbaai Fynbos Co-operative*
44. *Ummengeni Fishers Primary Co-operative Limited*
45. *Veldrift Fishing Primary*
46. *Vredenburg Multipurpose Primary*
47. *Waehuiskrantz Kleinskaalsevisserye Primary Co-operative Limited*
48. *Westdene Hermanus Fisheries Primary Co-operative Limited*
49. *Whale Coast Fisheries and Enterprise Primary Co-operative Limited*
50. *Zajikizinto Phillipi Co-operative*

EASTERN CAPE

51. *Eastern Cape Khoisan Fisheries*
52. *Eastern Cape Black Fishers*
53. *Koukamma small scale fishing cooperative*
54. *Sarah Baartman small scale fishers cooperative.*
55. *Coldstorm Fisheries cooperative*
56. *Elinye Small scale fishing cooperative*
57. *MoegGesukkel Visserye Co-op Ltd*
58. *Chascavu Fishing Primary Co-operative Limited*
59. *Mngazana Mangrove Fishing Primary Co-operative*
60. *Msikaba Mouth Fishing Primary Co-operative*
61. *Mthalala Fishing Primary Co-operative Limited*
62. *Port St Johns Central Fishing Primary Co-operative Limited*
63. *Flat Rock Fishing Primary Co-operative Limited*
64. *Kiwane Fishing Primary Cooperative*
65. *Benton Fishing Primary Cooperative*
66. *Nomngcingi Fishing Primary Co-operative Limited*
67. *Umlibo fishing primary cooperative*

KWAZULU NATAL

68. *Mnini Fishing Primary Co-op Ltd*
69. *Senzakwenzeke Cooperative*
70. *Mnafu fishing primary cooperative*