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Third DFFE Minister in Two Years, Yet Small-Scale Fishers Still Wait for Change in the sector

On 1 July 2026, President Cyril Ramaphosa appointed Mr David Maynier as the new Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment. This marks the third ministerial appointment for the department under the Government of National Unity (GNU) administration.

Masifundise and Coastal Links express deep concern regarding the continuous leadership transitions, as this raises serious issues for policy continuity and governance. These ongoing changes heavily impact small-scale fishing communities, whose livelihoods depend on stability, transparent governance, and timely decision-making. We therefore look forward to meaningful engagements with the Minister and hope to build a working relationship that improves the livelihoods of rightholders in inland and coastal fishing communities.

Since the formation of the GNU following the May 2024 national elections, South Africa has entered a new political phase intended to promote cooperation and stability. However, for the small-scale fisheries (SSF) sector, this period has instead been characterised by repeated institutional changes, creating significant challenges in maintaining consistent engagement with the Department of Fisheries, Forestry and the Environment (DFFE). Each leadership change disrupts ongoing processes, requiring communities and stakeholders to repeatedly rebuild relationships and restart engagement efforts with the DFFE.

Decisions taken within the DFFE have far-reaching consequences, affecting livelihoods, access to marine resources, biodiversity protection, as well as coastal development and resource extraction decisions that directly impact coastal communities across South Africa. Against this backdrop, questions arise from communities regarding how effective and consistent decision-making can be sustained in a department perceived as unstable.

Rovina Europa, chairperson of the Waenhuiskrans kleinskaal fishing cooperative in Arniston and Coastal Links leader stated that communication with the department has become increasingly difficult, and that changes in ministerial leadership only worsen existing challenges:

“The issue is each time there is a new appointment [of a Minister] there is a delay on our issues being resolved. People that do not have enough knowledge [of the fisheries sector] get appointed as Ministers or officials. They’re playing with our livelihoods to appoint a new Minister every time. It’s hard when there’s always a new Minister who gets appointed because then your complaints and requests are pushed to the side or stopped. It causes your income to be reduced because you have to wait for your permits to be issued and a signature from a [new] Minister who doesn’t understand what it’s for.”

Zakhele Nkamisa, a fisher from Port St Johns and Deputy Chair of Coastal Links in the Eastern Cape expressed further concern about the ongoing instability within the department:

“This department is doomed and there will be no progress. Since [Barbara] Creecy left, the problems for fishers remain unresolved.”

It is deeply concerning that this instability at national level continues to affect government leadership positions, with direct consequences for affected communities. Andries Booysen from Elandsbaai added:

“The GNU is supposed to bring change to South Africans’ living conditions, but we are not seeing that. Fishermen are among those most affected. The fisheries sector contributes significantly to the country’s economy, yet decisions keep changing. When one Minister commits to addressing issues, they are replaced, and the next brings a different approach. How long can this continue?”

Salvester Donn, chairperson of the Olifantsrivier Vissers cooperative and Coastal Links leader in Ebenhaeser, added:

“You try your best to build a good relationship with those in the department so that you can be proactive about matters affecting your cooperative. But then you have to go back to the drawing board each time to see whether previous commitments are still valid.”

It is evident that small-scale fishers continue to bear the severe consequences of decisions made at higher levels of government. It is also clear that there remains insufficient consideration of SSF communities in decision-making processes that directly affect their lives and livelihoods.

While we welcome the appointment of the new Minister, we hope to see Mr David Maynier engaging meaningfully with civil society and small-scale fishers in the sector to ensure that the voices of rightsholders are prioritised through structured and ongoing dialogue.

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