

PROPOSED RE-ZONATION OF THE ROBBERG MARINE PROTECTED AREA

MINUTES OF THE STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION MEETING

Venue: N.G. Kerk, 15 Marine Way, Plettenberg Bay, 6600

Date: 21th March 2014

Time: 10:00 – 12:00

1 Attendance

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Cornelius Krigga	Plett Fishing Forum	ckrigga@telkomsa.net	073 003 0827
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Herry McCallum	Plett Fishing Forum		
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Cornelius Luiters	Local		
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Quinten Snyman	Fynbos Private Reserve	quintensnyman@gmail.com	082 641 6546
Derrick Philandor	Private		079 275 2449
Vera Liebau	Anchor Environmental	info@anchorenvironmental.co.za	021 701 3420
Dr Barry Clark	Anchor Environmental	info@anchorenvironmental.co.za	021 701 3420

2 Welcome and Introduction

Dr Barry Clark opened the public participation meeting by introducing himself and outlining the agenda for the meeting. He explained that comments and recommendations will be received after a 20-30 minute presentation outlining the rationale behind the proposed re-zoning and re-alignment of the Robberg Marine Protected Area (MPA). He also pointed out that Vera Liebau will be capturing all comments made during the meeting. He explained that Marine Protected Areas are declared in terms of the Marine Living Resources Act 18 of 1998 and are recognised by the National Environmental Management Protected Areas Act 57 of 2003 (NEMPAA). No specific requirements for stakeholder consultation are required in terms of the former act. He emphasised that we recognise that stakeholder participation is crucial when drafting new regulations such as the re-zoning of the Robberg MPA. Therefore the public participation requirements as set out in section 33 of the NEMPAA were being followed in this instance. All interested and affected parties (I&APs) will be invited to submit formal written comment to the Minister within 60 days after a notice of intent to rezone/realign the MPA has been published in the *Government Gazette*. Dr Barry Clark explained that he recognised that not everyone reads the *Gazette* regularly and therefore that this meeting was a precursor to the formal process that will be initiated later this year. He explained that this meeting was intended to provide a more meaningful opportunity for stakeholder to comment on the proposal.

3 Presentation

Please refer to the PowerPoint presentation for details on this presentation.

4 Stakeholder comments

Cornelius Krigga commented that the exploding number of Cape fur seals is the problem affecting fish abundance and not the number of shore anglers or the amount of fish caught by shore anglers.

Denis Higgs asked why the spill-over effects of the Tsitsikamma MPA are not felt in Plettenberg Bay and why catches have remained the same or even decreased over time. He said that catches in the Tsitsikamma MPA are 10 times as high as in the Plettenberg Bay area.

Dr Barry Clark responded that the Tsitsikamma MPA was established in 1965 and that any increases in catch rates relating to spill-over (eggs, larvae and adults) would have been evident within the first 10 years following proclamation. Unfortunately no appropriate data was collected at the time that could demonstrate the same effects as observed in the Goukamma MPA (referring to the work by Kerwath *et al.* 2013). As a marine scientist, Dr Barry Clark is convinced that the Tsitsikamma MPA is seeding and maintaining catches in the Plettenberg Bay area.

Alan Hyde is also convinced that the increasing Cape fur seal population is the problem for declining catches of fish. If they are not the main problem, he said that he would like us to recognise that they at least contributed to the depleting of fish stocks in the Plettenberg area.

Dr Barry Clark explained that Cape fur seals don't necessarily eat the fish that shore anglers catch, but that they feed mostly on sardines and anchovy. Cape fur seals are a migratory species and follow their prey.

Alan Hyde commented that steenbras was no longer allowed to be caught by trek-netting because of declining fish stocks.

Dr Barry Clark agreed and said that he recently had visited the Piesang estuary and had found that the estuary was full of juvenile steenbras. He said that this is a result of protecting adult fish being exploited by trek netting and also improved protection of estuaries around the country which steenbras use as a nursery area.

Quinten Snyman pointed out that there are not enough fishermen that will give honest answers during interviews and argued that statistics presented by scientists are therefore not reliable. He also argued that we cannot compare other areas with the situation observed in Plettenberg Bay and that every area needs to be looked at individually. He also said that the local community has been fishing galjoen for a very long time. He also felt that large companies get away with crimes such as the dumping of valuable fish (undesired species) and illegally fishing in MPAs. He also explained that shore angling is very dependent on the right type of fishing gear and condition of the sea. In general he emphasised that he thinks the fisherman are more readily blamed than the large companies and that fisherman are not actually causing the damage that we see.

Andrew Wood pointed out that according to the presentation, the southern aspect of the Robberg peninsula shows very low fishing pressure and questioned whether closing this area would make a difference at all.

Quinten Snyman proposed to rather close the stretch between Rooikrans Cliffs and Richman's Place (Please refer to Figure 1 at the end of the minutes) where fewer people go shore angling due to poor accessibility (Please refer to Figure 2 at the end of the minutes).

Cornelius Krigga complained that fishermen are not allowed to collect bait in the Robberg MPA.

Dr Barry Clark explained that it is important not just to conserve the fish, but also the food for the fish. For example, dislodged red bait in stormy weather attracts fish and provides food for them.

Quinten Snyman was not convinced and stated that dislodged redbait is washed out and carried away by the currents, not necessarily attracting fish in this particular area. He clarified that he is not against the ban of bait collection and added that sometimes an overgrowth of one species can be harmful to the ecosystem.

Alan Hyde repeated and re-iterated that Cape fur seal colonies have increased 9 to 10 times the size that they used to be. He said that nobody is stopping them even though they clearly are the problem.

Corrie Nel asked whether we have bag limits for shore anglers that determine a minimum and a maximum size to protect old and fecund fish as well as juvenile fish. He pointed out that this is a very successful fishery management method in Australia and that this method could be used instead of creating a no-take zone.

Dr Barry Clark explained that we do have bag limits (restricting number/kg caught per permit), seasons where fishing is not allowed (to protect the population during the breeding season for example) and size limits (only lower limits). This fishery management strategy is implemented worldwide. The challenge is that South Africans, compared to Australians, are generally not as law abiding and these regulations are often not respected and also difficult to police.

Quinten Snyman added to the conversation that all he is concerned is catching fish to put food on the table and not for recreational purposes. Restricting fishing makes survival difficult. He said that most subsistence fishermen depending on fish as a food source are also previously disadvantaged people. He emphasised that it is problematic that subsistence shore anglers and other fishermen are pushed into the same category as recreational fishermen. He felt that closing the Robberg MPA would discriminate against these fishermen as all they wanted to do was preserve the area and its fish for the wealthy recreational fishermen. He also argued that such restrictions must be discussed on the local level and that local fishermen want to assist in developing new regulations.

Dr Barry Clark emphasised that he strongly agrees with the comments made by Quinten Snyman. He pointed out that the proposed changes should actually be welcomed by the subsistence fishers. The people that benefit the most from the current situation in the Robberg MPA are wealthy recreational fishermen as other forms of fishing (such as traditional linefishers) are banned in this area. He understood that the entry fee (currently R40) was a barrier to entry by poorer subsistence fishermen and thus under the current situation they were losing out. Closing the southern side of the peninsula is intended to make the situation more equitable.¹

¹ Additional information: Park entry fees are necessary for the maintenance of the Robberg Nature Reserve. Gates and entry fees were introduced to prevent uncontrolled access, which had contributed to enhanced erosion along parts of the peninsula. Furthermore, visitors stayed after night fall and fires were frequently lit by night visitors within the reserve. It was seen as necessary to close the gates and introduce entry fees to control destructive activities within the Nature Reserve.

Quinten Snyman explained that another key issue is that some of the area adjacent to the Robberg Marine Protected Area is privately owned and access to these areas is difficult and limited.

Derrick Philandor proposed that government wants to close everything. He argues that the summer species can be caught on the southern side of the peninsula. He also argued that it is unfair as many fishermen support law enforcement. He also addressed the issue that relationships must be built between CapeNature and the fishermen. He continued by saying that he was raised here and being denied access to these fishing spots was very upsetting. He also claimed that local fishermen were excluded from this process.

Dr Barry Clark responded by saying that this meeting is the very first engagement with regards to the proposed changes of the Robberg MPA and that this process was widely advertised in the newspapers and through notices posted at the entrance to the MPA and local fishing clubs.

Cornelius Krigga pointed out that people are upset because there is no respect for his people and changes should be discussed by involving the local fishermen. He also explained that CapeNature's actions and decisions destroyed a lot of families. He clarified that he does not blame the current government, but the previous government.

Derrick Philandor said that local fishermen used to be able to take what they needed and the rest was returned to sea. He explained that if his people don't catch enough fish then not enough food is put on the table. He disagrees that subsistence shore angling has anything to do with declining fish stocks.

Kallie Erasmus asked why the MPA is not simply shifted to another area. He also asked what makes government pick this spot to create a no-take zone.

Dr Barry Clark explained that the Robberg peninsula is already protected by a nature reserve and an existing Marine Protected Area. Law enforcement structures are already in place and can be extended to the proposed area. He also emphasised that information about fish stocks and fishing effort are available in this area.

Quinten Snyman claimed that the purpose of the proposed changes is to favour tourists that bring in money.

Andrew Wood pointed out that fishing pressure is extremely low on the southern side and questioned whether this would have any impact on fish stocks at all.

Dr Barry Clark explained that it would be unfair to close the northern side as too many people are making use of this area. It was decided that it would be a more judicious approach to close the southern side of the peninsula. In essence, closing the southern side is a compromise which takes into consideration conservation targets as well as the uses of this area (southern side is less accessible and has high wave activity).

Kallie Erasmus said that he believes that local fishermen are viewed as collateral damage.

Dr Barry Clark argued that it is unfair to allow shore angling while boat-based fishing is not permitted. This has to be changed from an equity point of view. He also clarified that Anchor Environmental Consultants simply advises and does not make the decision.

Alan Hyde repeated what he thinks about the exploding seal population. He explained that he has been living in the area since 1970 and that Cape fur seal numbers used to be about 300. Now they have increased to about 7000 and eat all the fish.

Jackie Le Roux said that the southern part of the Robberg peninsula is his favourite fishing spot and he says that most of the time he is the only person there. He also agrees and sees no reason to close the area if fishing pressure is so low.

Dr Barry Clark re-iterated that the goal is to gain a stretch of coast for conservation of marine life and fish stocks without disrupting too many people's activities.

Andrew Wood repeated once again whether it is necessary to close a site with such little fishing pressure and asked whether it would not be possible do some more research and consider closing another site.

Kallie Erasmus claimed that this proposal is put forward because it is convenient to close this site.

Dr Barry Clark agreed and reiterated that it is convenient because the legal and law enforcement structures are in place, that it can be linked to the terrestrial nature reserve and most importantly that it does not disrupt as many people as it would if the northern side was closed to shore angling. He also explained that South Africa's government has set targets for the expansion of Marine Protected Areas for the conservation of our fish resources as well as for the protection of biodiversity. He further explained that these targets are in line with the international agreements which South Africa is party to.

Andrew Wood pointed out that the data that is used to demonstrate fishing pressure along the coast of the southern part of the Robberg peninsula represents boat-based angling and not shore angling. He demanded that he would like to see such data for shore angling, which then could support the closing of this area to all fishing.

Unnamed person went back to comment on the Cape fur seal problem. He argued that local fishermen have the hypothesis that seals could be the problem. He asked if research has been done to look at links between fish population declines and exploding seal populations. He asked whether it would be possible to approach a university to see if research could be done in the Plettenberg Bay area. He further argued that the figures are outdated, showing results from 2000 (he referred to Kerwath *et al.* 2013). He argued that the situation has become a lot worse since the research that we presented.

Dr Barry Clark explained that research is available to show how much seals eat per day and how much anglers catch. He acknowledged that seals may have an impact on fish population in an indirect way (by eating sardines and anchovies), he pointed out that there are many more people than seals and that we have to acknowledge that we have an impact on the amount of fish that is available. He further explained that sardines used to be very abundant on the west coast and that stocks have moved eastwards onto the south coast around 2000. This migration has been linked to the migration of seals eastwards (Cape fur seals following the food) and could explain the growth in the Plettenberg Bay colony over the last few years. Sardine fish stocks have been observed to be migrating back towards the west coast and this could trigger seal migration away from Plettenberg Bay.

Andrew Wood suggested that we should be monitoring seal numbers now that sardines have been observed to be migrating westwards.

Cornelius Krigga also shared the view that local fishermen are excluded from the area because of the tourists so that few guys can make a lot of money. He also pointed out that tourists feed the seals.

Kallie Erasmus explained that it is a fight between the local fishermen and the seals.

Dr Barry Clark clarified that our mandate is not to profit the tourism industry but to protect fish stocks.

Kallie Erasmus referred back to an earlier argument and asked why local fishermen in Plettenberg Bay are not benefiting from the Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Area. He also proposed to extend the Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Area instead of the Robberg Marine Protected Area.

Dr Barry Clark responded that Tsitsikamma MPA was already very large and that further closure would not be justifiable.

Corrie Nel shared that he cannot catch fish anymore, mainly because access to most fishing spots is now denied by the expansion of private property.

Alan Hyde argued that for years fishers using deck boats were blamed. After they were no longer allowed to fish, no improvement could be seen and fishing even got worse. Stocks were supposed to regenerate after 10 years and they have not. He concluded that similarly, closing the southern side of the Robberg peninsula is not going to make a difference as the Cape fur seal is causing fish stocks to decline.

Jackie Le Roux agrees that seals are the main problem.

Cornelius Krigga once again brought up the issue why fishermen in Plettenberg Bay did not benefit from closing the Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Area.

Dr Barry Clark explained that the Tsitsikamma reserve was established in 1965 and that benefits would have been noticed about 10 years after that. However, since then the number of fishers has increased and more fish is taken today. He still emphasised that he does think that the Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Area does maintain fish stocks in the Plettenberg Bay area and that catches would be even worse without protection.

All attendees disagree and explain that the number of fishermen has decreased over time and that there used to be 10 times the number of fishermen compared to today.

Andrew Wood proposed to close some of the coast between Plettenberg Bay and Knysna.

Dr Barry Clark responded that he would take this comment on board.

Unnamed person complained that having to pay to enter the Robberg Nature Reserve is a financially challenging for local fishermen.

Dr Barry Clark responded to say that this was a separate issue and would need to be addressed in a separate meeting.

Pierre de Villiers stood up and responded to all these comments by acknowledging that there had not been sufficient communication between the local fishermen and CapeNature to date. He suggested that a forum must be set up such that the local community can share their experiences and opinions on a regular basis. He said that CapeNature needs to understand what mistakes were made and who was affected in a negative way. He also assured that there is no hidden agenda behind the proposal to declare the southern aspect of the Robberg peninsula as a no-take zone. This initiative is about marine resource management and not tourism. He also admitted that this meeting had become increasingly tense and that perhaps a follow-up meeting would be required to talk more. He also said that he was not aware that local fishermen were struggling with access to fishing sites. He promised that the problems of access to fishing spots outside the MPA because of private coastal property would be addressed as soon as possible.

Henk Nieuwoudt said that everyone in the room had been asked in the past to attend public participation meetings and most of the time attendance was poor.

Alan Hyde said that once, he had been told by a private beach property owner that he had to leave the beach and that he was not allowed to fish there.

Pierre de Villiers clarified that this person had no legal power to chase him from the beach as beach is public property, not private property. He promised that he would ensure that formal access points will be applied for. It will be very important to have a forum to ensure that we apply for meaningful access points.

Henk Nieuwoudt said that applications for such access points had been submitted. These access points would include boardwalks to the beach. He also recognised that access is a problem for local fishermen.

Cornelius Krigga suggested that a meeting with all the small-scale fishers should take place to discuss meaningful points of access to the coast. The forum should also meet with the municipality and communication must be established with all relevant private home owners.

5 Closure

Dr Barry Clark thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

He also reminded all stakeholders that the commenting period for this pre-public participation process ends on the 25 April 2014 and that a formal commenting period of 60 days will commence as soon as the Notice is published in the *Government Gazette*. The meeting was closed at 19:00.

6 Amended proposal based on recommendations in this meeting

During the public participation meeting, it was recommended to close parts of the northern side of the Robberg Peninsula (between Richman's Place and Rooikrans Cliffs) instead of the southern aspect as a whole. Figure 1 shows an amended proposal based on the comments provided during the meeting. Figure 2 shows the popular fishing sites on the Robberg Peninsula. ***All interested and affected parties are encouraged to provide further comments on the proposal below.***



Figure 1: Amended proposal of the location of no-take zones within the Robberg Marine Protected Area. The blue line shows the outline of the Robberg Marine Protected Area and the red polygons indicate the position of proposed no-take zones.

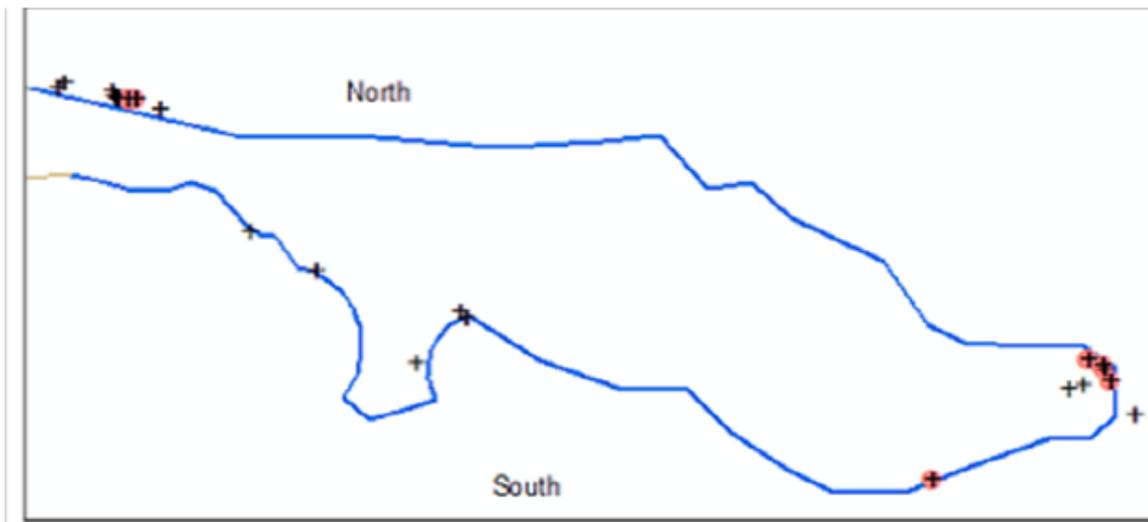


Figure 2: Location of fishing sites on the north and south banks of the Robberg Nature Reserve determined from roving creel surveys (Anchor Environmental, 2011).