

The South African deep-sea trawl fishery for hake

A sustainable and well-managed fishery

The Marine Stewardship Council certification

The South African hake trawl fishery is certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), the world's leading certification and eco-labelling program for sustainable wild-caught seafood.

The fishery was first certified in 2004. After the initial five-year certification period came to an end in 2009, it was re-assessed and re-certified for a five-year period in 2010. The latest certification was in 2015, following a rigorous 12-month re-assessment process during which an independent certification agency scrutinised every aspect of the fishery's management and once again found it to comply with the MSC's main principles. These are:

- a fishery is conducted in such a way that it does not lead to over fishing or a decrease in the stock;
- fishing operations do not impact on the health of the marine ecosystem;
- fishing is managed and regulated in a responsible way.

The South African trawl fishery for hake is the only fishery in Africa to have achieved certification from the MSC. It is one of approximately 286 fisheries in 36 countries that have been certified by the MSC. Together, MSC fisheries currently catch about 9.3 million metric tonnes of seafood per year – about 10% of the global harvest of wild capture fisheries.

The Marine Stewardship Council

The Marine Stewardship Council is an independent non-profit organisation which sets a standard for sustainable fishing. Fisheries that wish to demonstrate they are well managed and sustainable compared to the science-based MSC standard are assessed by a team of experts who are independent of both the fishery and the MSC. Fisheries that are certified against the MSC standard may display the blue MSC ecolabel on seafood products that can be traced back through the supply chain to the certified fishery.



Photo courtesy Birdlife SA

A suite of management measures

The trawl fishery for hake has been tightly managed and closely monitored since November 1977 when South Africa declared its exclusive economic zone (EEZ) under the United Nations Law of the Sea.

Today, the setting of an annual total allowable catch (TAC) remains the primary management measure for regulating the hake fisheries. However, a comprehensive suite of additional measures has been developed and implemented over time to address mainly socio-economic and ecosystem concerns. These measures are as follows:

- Restrictions on vessel power and size were introduced to the inshore trawl fishery in 2003.
- Capacity management measures were introduced to the deep-sea trawl fishery in 2008. Capacity-limitation models were developed by SADSTIA in partnership with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (now the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries) with the goal of avoiding fleet over capacity.
- Minimum mesh size regulations aimed at minimising the catch of juvenile fish were first implemented in 1974.
- Paired trawling was prohibited in 1977 in an effort to limit the impacts of fishing on the seabed.
- Restrictions on the lengths and hook spacing of longlines were introduced in 1994.
- Limits on the size and weight of bobbins and footropes were introduced in 2003, again in an effort to reduce the impacts of fishing on seabed habitats.
- Marine protected areas (closed to all forms of fishing) have been introduced for a number of reasons and some impact on deep-sea trawling. For example, a specific time/area closure is aimed at protecting kingklip spawning grounds. Additional closed areas aimed at protecting sensitive habitats are being considered in consultation with the fishing industry and other stakeholders.
- Ring fencing is a voluntary measure adopted by the hake trawl industry in 2008 to prevent the spatial expansion of trawling operations beyond areas that had already been impacted during the development of the fishery, to prevent further impact on the benthic habitat. The ring fenced area is monitored by vessel monitoring systems (VMS) and compliance is good.
- Mitigation of seabird mortalities includes vessel-specific offal management measures, the mandatory deployment of bird-scaring devices (tori lines) and regulations regarding the greasing of trawl warps.
- By-catch limitation measures have been introduced and include precautionary upper catch limits, “move-on” rules and restrictions on the proportions of by-catch species per landing.

Enforcement of regulations and permit conditions include monitoring of all landings, imposition of fines in the case of minor offences, or full legal action under Section 28 of the South African Marine Living Resources Act.



References

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