

# Fishing deep to provide economic benefits for South Africa

During the late 1960s and for most of the 1970s, catastrophic resource depletion by foreign fishing fleets threatened South Africa's hake resource, but responsible management over the past forty-two years has led to the growth and development of the deep-sea trawl fishery for hake, in turn contributing immensely to the country's GDP and creating jobs for 7 300 people.

**T**he benefits of sustainable fisheries extend far beyond the multiple businesses that harvest the resources, advantaging a broad cross section of people – from the SMMEs that supply everything from engineering services to food for fishing crews, to the people living and working in rural coastal communities such as Saldanha, St Helena Bay, Velddrif, Mossel Bay, Gansbaai and Hermanus.

The role that the deep-sea trawling industry plays in the South African economy was explained by Chairman of the South African Deep-Sea Trawling Industry Association (SADSTIA) and Director of Sea Harvest, Terence Brown. He expanded on the nature of the thirty-three right holders active in the fishery, the importance of sustainable fishing and the initiatives and programmes that SADSTIA has in place to promote socio-economic development. Talking about his multiple roles, Terence further explained how the long-term rights allocation process, which is scheduled for 2020, has the potential to impact many lives.

**Can you give me a brief background of yourself, your education, upbringing and where we are today?**

I was born and raised on the Cape Flats, in Lotus River, Grassy Park and attended South Peninsula High School in Diep River. Growing up was tough, but in hindsight the "street-smart" exposure was important for my future.



I have a qualification in mechanical engineering and 20 years of experience in the local and international fishing industry.

I was appointed as the Operations Director at Sea Harvest in September 2014. Before that appointment, I worked as Fleet Manager for Sea Harvest for five years, and then moved to the Oceana Group where I held various roles in fleet and production management. In addition to these roles, I worked as General Manager at Ireland Blyth Limited, a fishing company owned by a Mauritian conglomerate, for five

years. Currently, I serve as Chairman of the Sea Harvest Foundation and as a trustee of the Sea Harvest Employee Trust. I am an Executive Director on the board of the Sea Harvest Corporation, and a Non-Executive Director of SeaVuna Fishing.

**Can you please elaborate more on SADSTIA?**

There are a number of recognised industrial bodies in the South African fishing industry and SADSTIA is one of them. The Association represents all thirty-three right holders in



the deep-sea trawl fishery for hake. Its role is to engage with stakeholders – including government, organised labour, scientists, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), interest groups and the broader fishing industry – for the benefit of its members and the hake trawl fishery. One of the things the Association works hardest at is supporting the infrastructure required for science-based fisheries management and creating an enabling environment for sustainable fishing. Our fishery is Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) accredited. That means it is certified “sustainable and well-managed” by the most respected certification programme for sustainable, wild-caught fish in the world. It is worth pointing out that our fishery is the only fishery in Africa to have achieved accreditation from the MSC.

#### Who are the members of SADSTIA?

SADSTIA's members vary considerably in size and character. Essentially there are three categories of right holders and each category operates according to a different business model. There are large, vertically integrated companies, medium-sized businesses and also smaller players that have to work together to achieve economies of scale. This diversity creates a good balance in the industry because each category supplies different types of

products. Consequently, there is no oversupply of any one product in the market.

Importantly, as a result of government policies on black economic empowerment and the linking of fishing rights with transformation criteria, SADSTIA's membership is highly transformed. A study completed in April 2019 by the independent empowerment research and ratings agency, Empowerdex, confirmed that 66.6% of our fishery is black-owned.

#### Why is the hake deep-sea trawl fishery so important to South Africa?

The hake deep sea trawl fishery is a R6.7 billion per year contributor to South Africa's economy, that's number one. Number two is the fishery employs 7 300 people. Investments in the fishery are estimated to be worth approximately R6.6 billion. This includes ships – our vessels are large, ocean-going ships that can operate in extremely rough seas – factories and various other types of infrastructure.

We catch hake at depths of up to 800 meters, fishing about 150 kilometres offshore. There's a huge infrastructure in place to enable the fishing vessels to catch the fish. Next time you look at your parcel of hake and chips, think about the fact that it took a ship worth approximately R250 million to catch the fish, and it cost about R350 000 to keep that ship out at sea

every day. There's about 150 000 tons of hake available in South Africa every year and our fishery lands about 122 000 tons of that. South African hake is exported to about 22 countries all over the world.

#### Given that SADSTIA members fish with large vessels, on an industrial scale, is your industry sustainable?

Yes. The industry is a mature industry and our members understand the importance of sustainability. There is good collaboration between industry and scientists within the Department of Environment, Forestry & Fisheries (DEFF) and we participate in a forum called the Scientific Working Group, which sits practically every quarter, or more frequently if needed. There's debate around the science and the management of the fishery and so forth, and it is very constructive. Since 2004, the fishery has been certified by the MSC which uses a very demanding, science-based system to assess fisheries. The good news is MSC certification has really improved our fishing methods. We are fishing more responsibly than ever.

#### Can you provide some examples of responsible fishing?

Fishing is very well regulated. You can't fish as you please, there are rules that are included

in your permit conditions. For example, if you don't catch the right fish – the right size or right species of fish – you can lose your permit. So, responsible fishing starts with compliance with fishing regulations and the rules stipulated on your fishing permit. The activities of all the vessels in the fleet are monitored by satellite at all times.

SADSTIA also has a number of other programmes in place, which help us to fish responsibly. For example, with the environmental NGO, WWF-SA, we have established fisheries improvement projects (FIPS). These enable us to improve certain aspects of our fishing operations, for example the control of “bycatch” – species other than hake that are caught in our trawl nets. We also work closely with DEFF and other NGOs; these partnerships ensure that we take cognisance of our impact across the entire ecosystem.

**What are some of the most pressing issues affecting the hake deep-sea trawl fishery?**

Our members hold 15-year fishing rights that allow them to participate in the deep-sea trawl fishery for hake.

The current 15-year period ends in 2020 and a fishing rights application process is currently underway. For this reason, our members are focused on the impending rights allocation process – obviously they would like to retain their rights after 2020.

Interestingly, a lot has happened in our fishery over the past 15 years. In 2005, when rights were last allocated, the industry as a whole was approximately 30% black-owned; today we are 66.6% black-owned.

**What are your responsibilities as Chairman of SADSTIA, and your responsibilities as a director of Sea Harvest?**

My job as Operations Director is to ensure that Sea Harvest's land-based operations in Saldanha Bay run smoothly. My job covers many aspects: managing operations, managing communities, and ensuring that the impact and

the relationship between our organisation and key stakeholders are maintained. One aspect of my job with Sea Harvest is that I am Chairman of the Sea Harvest Foundation. In this role I work with NGOs and government around socio-economic development. In the past two years, Sea Harvest has built a pre-school, and we are in the process of refurbishing twenty-two day care centers.

With respect to SADSTIA, I am primarily responsible for member and stakeholder liaison. When there is a crisis, such as the water and electricity crisis, which we were faced with recently, it is my responsibility to work with the members to manage those issues.

I also spend time with individual right holders, who may require personal attention, or assistance with information or technical details they need to operate their businesses successfully. Fortunately, I have a good vice-chair and a good secretary in place and we support each other, which makes life more manageable. ▲



Photos courtesy of Birdlife South Africa

# Taking seabirds seriously

Seabirds provide a good example of SADSTIA's work to improve fishing methods in the deep-sea trawl fishery for hake

**O** riginally, longline and gillnet fisheries were seen to pose threats to seabirds. Foraging albatrosses and petrels often become hooked or snarled in lines when they flock around fishing boats, searching for scraps or, more frequently, "stealing" bait. Gannets and other diving seabirds are frequently caught in static nets. Prior to 2014, nobody had thought that trawling posed a seabird mortality problem, but in that year, Birdlife International discovered seabird kills were indeed a problem in trawl fisheries off the Falkland Islands – and by implication in other Southern Hemisphere trawl fisheries too.

WWF-SA and Birdlife South Africa soon demonstrated that seabird interactions did occur in South African trawl fisheries. The seabird deaths surprised even the most experienced skippers and deckhands: it was difficult to see the birds flying into the trawl cables and hardly any injured or lifeless birds were retrieved by

fishers; it was only when the occurrences were captured on film that scientists and the trawling industry understood the degree to which trawl fisheries were also contributing to the global decline of seabird – and especially albatross – populations.

With the help of WWF-SA and Birdlife SA, SADSTIA moved quickly to resolve this problem. In 2006 the deployment of bird scaring devices which are called "tori lines" (tori being the word for "bird" in Japan), became mandatory in the deep-sea trawl fishery.

The lines consist of a length of rope from which six to ten brightly coloured streamers are hung.

The streamers flutter in the wind and are effective at scaring birds away from the stern of a fishing vessel where they may be accidentally killed or injured when they collide with trawl warps – the strong braided wire ropes used to tow the trawl net.

Today, tori lines are just one of a suite of measures introduced by SADSTIA to curb seabird interactions. These measures include a standard

for coating trawl cables with lubricants (sticky cables increase the potential for seabirds to become snagged in the trawl warps); a requirement to trim cable joins; a ban on releasing offal during winching; and the development of individual bird management plans.

Together, these measures have virtually eradicated the problem of seabird bycatch in the deep-sea trawl fishery for hake. A paper published in the respected scientific journal *Animal Conservation* in 2014 documented how the deployment of tori lines in the deep-sea trawl fishery reduced albatross deaths by a remarkable 99% in seven years – between 2006 and 2013.

Tori lines are easy to deploy, but to be effective they have to be individually set up for each vessel, or class of vessel, and they must be correctly deployed immediately after the trawl net has been lowered to the water. It takes commitment and dedication from skippers and fishing crews to make sure the tori lines are flown correctly from the very start of every single trawl. ▲

