

Hobie Beach fish farm spawns shark fears

A six-kilometre floating fish farm anchored off Port Elizabeth's popular Hobie Beach is set to go ahead despite an outcry that it will be a magnet for sharks and pose a massive threat to eco-tourism, marine life and investment in Nelson Mandela Bay.



Source: [Wikipedia](#)

It is the first government-sanctioned project of its kind in South Africa, with testing grounds marked for Algoa Bay.

But in an attempt to block the project, top bay marine experts, conservationists and several beachfront hotels formed a consortium last week and are seeking legal advice on how to stop the plan.

They fear the farm - set to be anchored about 2.5km off Hobie Beach - could ruin the bay and see losses of hundreds of millions of rands in tourism revenue due to the cancellation of major water sports events.

Already, Ironman South Africa has said it would be forced to seek an alternative city to host the event if the project goes ahead.

As part of the first phase, 11 booms 15m in depth will be placed 2.5km off Hobie Beach.

The 30m floating fish farms will then be shifted within the allocated area which, according to an assessment report, is to "prevent the buildup of organic waste under the cages which has negative environmental impacts".

The project is set to be rolled out over five years and will see more than 315 boom-type structures, each with a 30m diameter with 15m-long nets surrounded by 2m-high floating walls.

When finished, it will cover about 6km stretching from Hobie and Pollok beaches towards the Cape Recife Nature Reserve.

Hotel owners and marine biologists have lashed out after being alerted only last week that the Department of Environmental

Affairs issued authorisation for the development of the aquaculture development zone, commonly known as a fish farm, in Algoa Bay.

The authorisation was granted to the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF).

Once Environmental Affairs Minister Edna Molewa gives the green light, the project will seek investors - mainly international - to whom it will award licences.

DAFF spokesman Lionel Aderndorf confirmed that, as part of the final stages, the project had been sent to Environmental Affairs for sign off.

He, however, failed to respond to other questions sent to him.

The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), done by Cape Environmental Assessment Practitioners in 2011, identified the location as a "suitable land and sea space".

The EIA report states that a total of nine "commercial-scale finfish farms" could eventually be introduced with the aim of procuring about 30,000 tons of yellowtail fish a year.

The 69-page report, which The Herald has seen, says the farm would affect the environment negatively and cause conflict with other users - namely fishermen using the shipping lanes.

It recommends that "large shark movement patterns" be monitored and control measures put in place for waste discharge.

In addition, to prevent whales and dolphins from being entangled in the nets, a rapid response unit should be established.

Another specialist report linked to the EIA report says there will be a "definite long-term" negative impact on tourism, vessel traffic and general marine life in the bay.

Under probable long-term effects, it lists conflict with the local fishing industry and, under high risk, is the drop in bay real estate prices.

The report says Algoa Bay is one of the more favourable sites on the South African coastline.

Ironman SA director Paul Wolff, who is part of the consortium, said that as soon as the first net dropped into Algoa Bay, he - and other watersport event organisers - would be forced to leave town.

"This project has massive implications for all residents, tourism, watersport enthusiasts as well as the hospitality industry.

"Ironman, the International Yachting Championship taking place next year, surfing competitions and divers from around the world will be forced to look for other sites."

Wolf said research showed the mass production of fish would attract great white sharks, most of which fed outside the bay but would now be lured closer by the mass fish breeding. "The Ironman event alone brings R40-million into Nelson Mandela Bay," Wolff said.

"Then you have the other triathlon events, swimming events and various other watersport competitions.

"It is madness that this idea has actually got this far."

Marine biologist Shirley Parker- Nance said high levels of excrement, leftover food, chemicals and drugs administered to the fish would all be pushed onto the city's beaches.

"Untreated effluent will be carried in the water column and with the aid of prevailing wind and sea currents, wash up onto nearby tourist beaches," she said.

"The bad-smelling plankton-laden water, high possibility of encountering sharks and increased bacterial load due to faecal matter would lead to revoking of the International Blue Flag statuses and a drop in tourism.

"Studies have shown that stocked cages attract both wild fish and predatory species such as sharks."

The alternative was land-based farming which had already proved commercially viable in East London.

"Importantly, the Coega Development Corporation has made provision for the development of finfish aquaculture which is believed to provide 3000 permanent jobs," she said.

Boardwalk casino general manager Brett Hoppe said he was gravely concerned about the negative impact on tourism, so much so that the matter was handed over to its legal team.

"We have spent several years and lots of money marketing the bay as a watersports destination. All this now hangs in the balance," he said.

Ward councillor Dean Biddulph (DA) said: "I have some very serious concerns about the proximity of this proposed project so close to our main tourist beaches.

"I fear this decision is essentially akin to shooting ourselves in the foot as it places a number of key events at immediate risk."

Biddulph said a meeting with the provincial legislature had been set up for today to discuss the issue.

Source: Herald