

## Department addresses concerns of fishing community

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment has noted the concerns raised by the fishing communities regarding the reduction in the West Coast Rock Lobster Total Allowable Catch (Tac).



Source: Derek Keats via [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The department said in a statement on Thursday said it is acutely aware that fishing communities, especially small-scale fishers, are more vulnerable to the impact of the recently announced reduction in the catch quota.

The West Coast Rock Lobster fishery has been experiencing challenges of rapidly declining stocks in recent years.

Besides the sector being faced with increasing demand from fishing communities and the broader public for access to the resource, illegal fishing and the effects of climate change have also contributed to the vulnerability of the species.

"The Tac announced annually has been based on scientific and operational information since 1997.

"A Tac of 837 tons has been determined for the 2020/21 fishing season taking in to account the impact of the Covid-19

pandemic on the industry, the highly depleted status of the WCRL resource, and lower-than-expected resource status indicators," said the department.

It said Covid-19 had a negative impact on market demand for the majority of the 2019/20 season, with losses being incurred by the West Coast Rock Lobster fishing sector.

"The 2021 updated assessment indicates that West Coast Rock Lobster number have decreased more than expected in the past two years. Rather than being at 90% of its 2006 level as estimated in 2019, the resource is now estimated to be at only 70%.

"In recent decades WSRL populations have been at about 2.5% of the accepted pristine level in 1910. However, the numbers have dropped to about 1.5% of the pristine level of late.

"In determining the 2020/21 season allocation and the recommendation for 2021/22, all relevant data required to produce a comprehensive assessment was collected and analysed."

The updated assessment, said the department, makes it clear that the status of the resource is now appreciably worse than thought to be the case 12 months ago.

A meaningful reduction in the TAC is, therefore, necessary to rebuild the resource from its current 2021 level by 2025.

Among the measures being considered by the department to address existing challenges are:

- Increasing compliance-related efforts to combat poaching and over-fishing;
- Improving the collection and processing of poaching and local market sales statistics;
- Piloting of a live traceability system;
- The deployment of catch data monitors along the South African coastline and
- Increasing the capacity and scope to monitor landings in the commercial, small-scale, and recreational fishing sectors.

In addition, the department has met with community-based organisations and leaders in fishing communities to discuss improvement plans related to the Interim Relief Dispensation.

One of the announcements made by the department is to avail additional fish species that can be harvested by fishing communities under the Interim Relief Dispensation.

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