

Minister checks on harbour works

Maryke Swart

The dredging renovations and refurbishment of the old Gordon's Bay harbour has contributed greatly to extending the days vessels can be active and will allow commercial fishers to make the most of the quota fishing days.

This was the shared sentiment of many commercial fishers and local residents present during Public Works Minister Thulas Nxesi's site visit to the old harbour last Wednesday (10 October).

Nxesi boarded a vessel of Alven Driver, a local commercial fisherman, to evaluate the dredging process which commenced in July. The project has proven helpful in removing sandbanks and other materials that pose a threat to vessels.

His visit forms part of the department's small harbours and state coastal property development unit's special intervention repair programme, under the auspices of Operation Phakisa. The first activities have seen the removal of 29 sunken vessels across seven of the province's 12 proclaimed fishing harbours (PFH). Gordon's Bay had no sunken vessels.

Other activities implemented include dredging of harbour basins, repairs and upgrades of slipways, shore crane replacements, security installations and operations, and civil infrastructure repairs. The programme will further contribute to the rehabilitation of the harbours, including job creation and empowerment of small business owners, Nxesi explained.

To date, the dredging project has benefited 10 small enterprises, including



Minister Thulas Nxesi (far right) and other stakeholders evaluate the dredging process at Gordon's Bay Harbour. With him (from left) is Mustakim Gierdien, Sam Thobakgale (deputy director general), Nielan Nagan of Simunye Developers, the dredging contractor; back (in brown jacket) is Putumani Mbambe of Coega, the implementing agency for the Department of Public Works. Photo: Maryke Swart

three Helderberg companies, with R3,5 million already spent. The Gordon's Bay dredging contract alone has created 17 jobs.

The vessel ride was followed by Nxesi's interactive engagement with the community and commercial fishers, many of whom praised the initiative and department's efforts to assist commercial fishers in their fight for survival. They, however, issued a plea to Nxesi to call upon his colleagues from the Department of Forestry and Fisheries to come on board.

Driver, who has also assisted with the dredging process, expressed his appreciation towards the public works department for their support. Before the

project started, the vessels had severe difficulty entering and exiting the harbour due to sandbanks, he explained.

"It causes us to lose many days and, given that the quota period is limited, it poses a huge problem for commercial fishers. We are blessed with crayfish, much more than [at other] bays and 98% of our crayfish are eligible for export," Driver said, adding that the project has also had a positive effect on tourism.

"[The sandbanks] also prevented foreign boat owners from going out to sea when they come down for holiday. It detracted from the potential of the port.

"We've had to fork out R20 000 to R40 000 in expenses due to the fact that

“... we must maintain old infrastructure; the key is day-to-day maintenance

we've had to double bank. There were no safe berthing areas for vessels. We feel we are in the harbour, but not part of the harbour.”

Driver said since the project was implemented several job opportunities were created, “because it is now safe to access the harbour”. He further called for an ongoing maintenance plan to be implemented, in addition to other role-players' calls for closer engagement with locals, further development of the harbour and financial support to uplift fishing communities.

Nxesi said the department will engage in talks about a major infrastructure project in the months to come. “What is the purpose of building a new harbour if you can't manage maintenance of the old harbour. I'm not saying we should stop building new infrastructure, but we must maintain old infrastructure; the key is day-to-day maintenance. An important factor that was not taken into account was underground infrastructure,” he said.

Nxesi vowed to consult and engage with communities going forward. “For this to work we need partnerships. All [spheres of government] must work together, along with the private sector. You need partnership with local communities as [plans cannot be implemented without consultation].”