



Publication: Business Day - Main

Title: Hout Bay harbour to get a new lease on life

Publish date: 29 Jun 2023

Page: 3

Reach: 14530

AVE:R 33133.35

Author: Matthew Hirsch

Hout Bay harbour to get a new lease on life

Matthew Hirsch

The Hout Bay harbour will get an upgrade including a new fish processing and packaging facility, plus the allocation of 15-year fishing rights in the Western Cape by October "at the latest", in time for the West Coast lobster season.

The details were announced at an intergovernmental community meeting in Hout Bay last week that was attended by public works minister Sihle Zikalala, officials from the department of forestry, fisheries & the environment (DFFE), City of Cape Town officials, and community members.

Zikalala, who has previously announced that R500m would be set aside for repairs and maintenance of 13 harbours in the Western Cape, said the new processing and packaging facility in Hout Bay will provide jobs and create opportunities for fishers to market their catch.

Upgrades to the harbour, which has been blighted by crime and vandalism, will include refurbishment of the slipways, removal of sunken vessels, security measures, an upgrade and extension of the fish-cleaning shed, as well as electrical infrastructure upgrades, he said.

DFFE deputy director of small-scale fisheries management Abongile Ngqongwa said small-scale fishers who had 10 years or more experience in fishing-related industries will be able to form co-operatives.

The co-operatives will be for people who rely on fishing-related activities, and "reside in communities that are declared as fishing communities".

"We need to facilitate support programmes for the small-scale fisheries sector," Ngqongwa said, adding that 70% of small-scale fishers have no economic activity other than fishing.

Allocating fishing rights needs to take into account that marine resources are declining, he said. "To manage our resources we need to make sure that they are sustainable."

Professor Moenieba Isaacs at the University of the Western Cape's Institute for Poverty, Land and Agrarian Studies (Plaas), said the government made a decision to support big fishing companies because they provided jobs.

"Over the years ... these big companies have not increased the jobs, they have downscaled. A lot of the people who were left over have been absorbed into small-scale fishers."



New look: Hout Bay harbour is to get a new processing and packaging facility, which will provide jobs. /Shelley Christians/The Times

Isaacs said that when it came to the sustainability of fishing stocks, the government has been "extremely precautionary" in allocating fishing rights, but they've always favoured the big companies.

"It's the companies with the big trawlers that are taking the stock, not necessarily small-scale fishers."

A fish production and packaging facility at the harbour will be a step in the right direction if small-scale fishers are the ones running it and selling to the market, she added.

"I think that is a positive initiative. Hout Bay is a traditional market where you find a lot of tourists."

Max Ozinsky, a boat owner and former acting director-general of the department of defence & military veterans, said it is easy to overlook the problems created by the department of public works in the harbour. That includes a former fishmeal factory that has been vacant and unprotected since 2021, resulting in the building being stripped by looters.

"If you start in Pretoria thinking that these are criminals, then you engage in a particular way. At one stage three years ago, the two departments dropped pamphlets complaining about criminality, but not once did they call a meeting to engage with the community about why that was happening," he said.

Ozinsky proposes a workshop for government officials and the community to build trust.

"We need the documents and the policies ... We need reasonable time frames that allow for community participa-

tion. That doesn't mean officials giving seven days for people to respond to a business plan," he said.

Gregg Louw, the chair of the Hout Bay Aquafarmers Co-operative, said the biggest problem for the community is the lack of relationships with the government.

Louw said while facilities and infrastructure such as the former fishmeal factory are leased to corporations, local fishers can be given access.

"Stop looking at us as only good enough for employment; we can also employ people. The issue of opportunities is very important," Louw said.

Zikalala said the department is aware Hout Bay harbour is surrounded by historically disadvantaged communities.

"We are committed to ensuring that they benefit from the economy of the harbours," he said.

An assessment of Hout Bay harbour was conducted by the SA Police Service and the department had implemented its recommendations, he said. CCTV cameras, boom gate upgrades, perimeter walls and fencing and security lighting will form part of the upgrades.

Mayoral committee member for Urban Mobility and Hout Bay ward councillor Rob Quintas said he is delighted with the commitment being shown by the department of public works to see the harbour realise its "considerable social and economic potential".

In a letter to Zikalala in May, Quintas said the City wanted to work with the national government to unlock the harbour's potential. /GroundUp