

Government accepts recommendations for West Coast Rock Lobster fishery

Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment Barbara Creecy has accepted a set of recommendations by the Consultative Advisory Forum (CAF) appointed to advise on the West Coast Rock Lobster fishery.

In a statement on Monday, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment said the necessary regulatory processes will be followed to give expression to this decision.



Department addresses concerns of fishing community

22 Oct 2021



The report has recommended that the West Coast Rock Lobster Total Allowable Catch (TAC) be increased for the 2021/22 season to 700 tons from the present 600 tons given the dire socio-economic conditions of fishers reliant on West Coast Rock Lobster (WCRL) for their livelihood.

The Minister appointed the forum in November following concerns raised by fishing communities about the reduction of the West Coast Rock Lobster Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for the present season based on challenges linked to declining stocks.

The forum handed its report to the Minister on 10 December 2021.

In addition to recommending an increase in the TAC for the current fishing season, the Consultative Advisory Forum also recommended that the department pilot a more participatory “co-management” approach to the fishery to improve stakeholder buy-in.

The forum also recommended the urgent implementation of a poaching reduction strategy to maintain the stock and ensure fishing communities receive benefits along the entire value chain through capacity building and regulation of marketers.

"The CAF recognised that the method used to determine the TAC was sound and subjected to peer review by international experts. However, the CAF recommended that the department consider whether the relatively high variance of the Fishery Independent Monitoring Survey (FIMS) data could be affecting trend estimates and the implications of un-surveyed components of stock, especially in deeper water.

"The CAF recommended the department consider introducing a coastal "reference fleet" to support closing data gaps and review commercial catch per unit effort (CPUE) data, specifically trap landing slips as some stakeholders expressed concern about trap landing slips which may incorrectly over report trap effort," the department said.

The report also emphasised the importance of improving understanding of stock sizes less than 75mm carapace length (especially females).

"It is recommended that a more supported poaching estimate should be agreed upon by the WCRL Scientific Working Group, small-scale fishers and industry observers by the 2022/23 fishing season.

"The forum agreed that addressing differing poaching estimates through a collaborative approach by industry, small scale fishers and non-governmental organisations could lead to improved estimates and greater stakeholder confidence in fishery model inputs and outputs," the department said.

The CAF recommended that the poaching reduction strategy should include steps to improve estimates of illegal fishing and thereby increase confidence in fishery model inputs and outputs.

"The strategy should develop a process for the department to approve marketers for the sector to close poaching loopholes, appoint independent catch monitors, and improve inter-agency co-operation, with links to the Operation Phakisa Integrated Enforcement Task Team. Drivers of poaching warrant consideration, including formal exclusion from a lack of legal fishing rights," the department said.

In terms of proportional cuts, it is advised that the 700 ton recommended TAC be implemented in such a manner that the recreational fishing sector remain at the allocation level of 21.57 tons (based on TAC of 600 tons), which means a negligible decrease in their proportion of the revised TAC.

The department said the "savings" should be split equally between the commercial fishing (nearshore) and the small-scale fishers (nearshore) and Interim Relief.

"The CAF further recognised a general lack of social and economic data and knowledge to effectively guide management in this fishery. It, therefore, recommended an integrated socio-economic study be done in parallel with poaching reduction strategy. This study can support future apportionment and allocation decisions," the department said.

The report states that while 700 tons is sustainable and was one of the recommended options from the Scientific Working Group, it noted that the level would not allow immediate resource recovery.

"Instead the CAF recommended resource recovery be phased in over a longer-term period. The CAF recommended a three-year phased reduction (700/550/400), which it said must be re-assessed each year. The recommended TACs will depend heavily on the urgent implementation of a poaching reduction strategy which will support resource recovery," the department said.

In terms of co-management, the forum recommended a cooperative approach consistent with the Small-Scale Fisheries Policy.

"Addressing these may present opportunities to improve co-management and achieve improvements in research, monitoring, administration and compliance. In terms of compliance, the forum recommends that the department together with small-scale fishers and stakeholders co-develop and implement the Poaching Reduction Strategy," the department said.

The report noted that capacity challenges within the Fisheries branch as a whole were impacting on the primary components of governance of this fishery, and urgent attention needs to be given to strengthening the capacity of the department.

Three focus areas to strengthen capacity were to implement effective Monitoring Compliance and Surveillance (MCS); strengthen the Small-Scale Fisheries Management unit and ensure the department is able to develop strategic partnerships for more coordinated research and co-management to assess and mitigate cumulative risks to this valuable resource.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>