

Government hopeful to issue 15-year rights to small-scale fishers

Environment, Forestry and Fisheries Minister, Barbara Creecy, says she is hopeful that the department will issue 15-year fishing rights to small-scale fishers in the Western Cape.



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The Minister said this when she presented the department's budget vote during a virtual sitting of the National Assembly on Thursday.

The Minister had recently spent 67 minutes, as part of Nelson Mandela International Day, with the World Wildlife Fund, meeting representatives from fishing communities in the Overberg Region of the Western Cape.

Creecy said the representatives spoke of the hardship small-scale fishers face in this difficult industry, including their exclusion from the more profitable aspects of the fish processing value chain, due to lack of access to affordable loans for tools of trade.

The representatives also spoke about their hunt for viable catch in the face of dwindling wild fish stocks.

"By October this year, we hope to issue 15-year fishing rights to small-scale fishers in the Western Cape.

"For the first time in our country's history, this will conclude a small-scale 15-year Rights Allocation Process to over 10,500 fishers organised into 110 co-operatives nationwide.

"The rights allocation process is a first step to formalising and developing small-scale fishers, who, even before the Covid-19 pandemic, faced enormous inequality, insecurity and barriers to economic participation," Creecy said.

Covid-19 recovery plan

Creecy said as government develops its medium-term recovery plan, attention must be focused immediately on stabilising sectors hard-hit by the pandemic.

"In our space, this includes particularly nature based tourism, the oceans economy, and the circular economy.

"The revised budget and plans we table for consideration today, represent our department's response to the difficult choices that confront us in stabilising our sector and opening possibilities for future growth," said Creecy.

The department received a net budget loss of 8.6%, amounting to a budget cut of R766m.

The Minister said the funds were surrendered as part of the department's contribution to the national Covid-19 response plan and to the post-lockdown economic recovery initiatives.

"To ensure the budget cut had a minimal effect on our programmes, we effected savings on advertorials, domestic and international travel, public meetings, stakeholder consultation and events, most of which are no longer possible under the current conditions.

"Our four entities - SANParks, SANBI, Isimangaliso and the Weather Service - all of which have a good record of revenue generation and financial self-sustainability, are unable to realise their usual income streams.

"In the first quarter of this financial year, our 'Working For' programmes were not able to operate due to lockdown conditions. By cutting back on now unachievable targets in this programme, we have been able to transfer R39m to the Isimangaliso Wetland Park Authority and R961m to SANParks," the Minister said.

She said this ensured the sustainability of the country's protected areas and the significant role they play in supporting our country's mega-biodiversity.

"We have also ensured the future sustainability of our contribution to nature based tourism and its longer-term employment potential."