

Another Sea-Based Aquaculture Development Zone on the Cards

By [FINSAs reporter](#)

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A view of the port of Mossel Bay. Photo: Stock

Another sea-based aquaculture development zone is on the cards. The establishment of this ADZ will no doubt mirror those of Algoa Bay and Saldanha Bay. The local communities were vociferous in their opposition to the development. No doubt this is likely to be the case with the latest ADZ as there is already a history to farming fish in the bay. But times are changing...

The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment recently released a list of four bidders to begin a basic assessment process for a proposed sea-based aquaculture development zone located within Mossel Bay for a period of 18 months.

The companies named are [SRK Consulting](#), [Nemai Consulting CC](#), [Ecosense Consulting](#) and [Sivest SA \(Pty\) Ltd](#)

Of the four companies, Cape Town-based Ecosense Consulting, is the only one with a locally-based branch office (Knysna). The company has provided environmental impact assessment services for well known and established projects. These include the Three Streams Hatchery & Smokehouse in Franshoek, the Molapong Aquaculture Project in Saldanha Bay and the Abalone Hatchery in Hondeklip Bay.

[Enabling Aquaculture. Saldanha Bay Makes Space for Fish Farming Development](#)

[Abalone Ranching. Can it Work on the West Coast?](#)

Sivest SA did the work for the environmental assessment for the Dube Tradeport Agrizone Phase 2 in Tongaat, KwaZulu Natal.

Operation Phakisa

Developing an active aquaculture sector is one of the focus areas of Operation Phakisa.

The parliamentary portfolio committee was updated about Operation Phakisa initiatives in November 2020. It heard that 45 projects have been implemented of which 29 are in production and 17 are in planning.

[Rethinking the Revival of SA's Aquaculture Sector](#)

The success of the Saldanha Bay ADZ was said to have promoted growth of the industry on the west coast and that by bringing small-scale fishers into the value chain, individual companies were now able to get access to the water.

These same small-scale farmers (e.g. mussel farmers) had also been able to access funding from the National Empowerment Fund (NEF).

This has not only empowered them as shareholders in the processing company but has also moved them from being price takers to market players.

[The Taste of Empowerment. Saldanha Mussel Farm Enjoys Upward Trend](#)

In February 2020, authorisation was received for the development of the Algoa Bay ADZ. This was despite vigorous opposition from the local community and environmentalists.

Their reservations have been somewhat vindicated by the news that Nelson Mandela Bay oyster farmer, Zwembesi Farms, is suing the municipality for R34 million for loss of income.

This came about after Zwembesi's oysters ([The Knysna Oyster Company](#)) were polluted by sewage which the company alleges was negligently discharged by the metro.

https://www.environment.gov.za/mediarelease/algoabayseabased_aquaculturedevelopment_environmentalauthorisationgranted

Some history

Just more than a decade ago Irvin & Johnson (I&J) wanted to establish a fish farm in the vicinity of Little Brak River and Rheeboek at Mossel Bay.

At the time I&J said it intended to establish as an additional source of fish for its Mossel Bay factory and was planning to rear finfish such as silver and dusky cob and yellowtail.

The fish, the company said, would be grown under controlled conditions. This was to take the form of up to 36 fish cages anchored in an area of 200 hectares of the bay, some 2.5 km off the Little Brak River mouth.

The Mossel Bay Municipality and Mossel Bay Tourism were determined this would not happen even though the (then) Minister of Water and Environmental Affairs, Ms B P Sonjica, had granted environment approval to the project.

The matter was referred to the High Court for review.

The Department of Zoology & Entomology at the University of Pretoria also supported the appeal. It said the plan to install a marine cage finfish farm within Mossel Bay conflicted with the fact that the bay is home to the protected white shark (*Carcharodon carcharias*).

This it said, had the potential to severely impact the population of white sharks within the bay as well as the Mossel Bay community.

Mossel Bay Tourism noted that the intended use of Acoustic Deterrent Devices (ADDs) to keep whales and sharks away was “extremely alarming because our experience has shown that the whale population drops when large-scale fishing – with its accompanying noise from droning motors – takes place in the Bay.”

“This has a direct impact on whale tourism,” said the Chairman of Mossel Bay Tourism at the time. “Which is one reason why sardine boats working here are prohibited from operating within two sea miles (about 4 km) of the coast during whale season.”

I&J eventually decided that the project would not be commercially viable.

Other projects, other objections

The Mossel Bay community continues to lodge objections to any developments in their bay.

This was the experience of local cannery, [Afro Fishing](#). In 2019 the company applied to expand its factory and build a state-of-the-art fishmeal plant.

The outraged community said the “stink” would drive away holidaymakers and potential investors, traffic to the harbour would increase, and that the quality of the sea water would be compromised.

[Afro Fishing Expansion. Socio-Economic Positives Outweigh Negatives](#)

A 467-page *Comments and Responses Report (Annexure F5) of Final Basic Assessment Report* which formed part of the public participation process documents the concerns.

Offshore gas exploration

In 2019, the Mossel Bay community heard that offshore gas exploration activity was starting in the Outeniqua Basin and that the departure point for the rig would be the port of Mossel Bay.

The rush the South African government seemed to be in to finalise the environment and social impact assessment application, was notable. Before the Mossel Bay community knew it, the rig was in South African waters and work began.

The discovery of Brulpadda *gas* condensate was just the start for Total which went on to make a further significant gas condensate discovery in the Outeniqua Basin just 45 -135km off the coast.

Read: <https://www.fishingindustrynewssa.com/2020/11/03/keep-a-close-eye-mixed-reaction-to-latest-gas-find/>

Strangely there did not seem to be the same energetic outcry from the community nor the Mossel Bay Municipality to this project. It was however not a missed opportunity for the environmental lobbyists.

Perhaps the explanation for this is that the Mossel Bay Municipality now falls under the auspices of the Garden Route District Municipality (GRDM).

Despite the many allegations of irregularities in issuing licenses, this alone could potentially alter the outcome of any environmental assessment in the future as the GRDM is very keen to grow business in the Southern Cape region.

As for the port of Mossel Bay, Transnet National Ports Authority reports that some R12,7 million is earmarked for a makeover. This includes a newly resurfaced road and parking spaces between Port Entrance 1 and the Mossel Bay Yacht and Boat Club premises where restaurants and other tourist attractions are located.

[Mossel Bay Slipway, Historic Rejuvenation Project On the Cards](#)

For now, it will be enough to put a smile on the faces of everyone that lives there!

