

Targets Trashed as Critics Say COVID-19 Pandemic An Excuse for Non-Delivery.

By FINSA reporter 15 March 2021



Keeping a check on the quarterly progress of national departments is a good thing – right? But as obvious as it is that a lot of work has been done, so too is there a lot of disappointment that not enough has been done, according to critics of the South Africa Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries. In particular, the spin that the COVID-19 pandemic is the reason why the Department has not delivered what is required of it.

Last week the parliamentary portfolio committee for fisheries was briefed by the Department of Environment Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) on its activities during the second and third quarters of 2020.

Bearing in mind that this was slap bang in the middle of the COVID-19 lockdown periods, DEFF reported that it was nevertheless able to achieve an overall 62% (fisheries 43%) of its targets across the Department's activities in the second

quarter. A further 22% (fisheries 36%) was still work in progress, and 16% (21%) was not achieved in the second quarter.

In the third quarter, it achieved 61% of its overall target across the Department's activities (fisheries 54%), with 29% (fisheries 23%) still work in progress, and 10% (fisheries 23%) not achieved.

Expenditure in the second quarter amounted to R1.97 billion, or 20% of the adjusted annual estimated expenditure of R9.94 billion. This had increased in the third quarter to R2.58 billion, or 26% of the annual budget. This left a balance of R3.96 billion available for the fourth quarter.

Disappointing output

Some members on the committee regarded the output as disappointing. They expressed that the COVID-19 pandemic was not an excuse for not achieving targets. In future they say they want specific timeframes to be implemented on the Oceans and Coast Programme.

They also wanted to know why the Department only managed to get only halfway through the estuary management process; how long the signatures on the Climate Change Bill had been outstanding; why the high-level panel report was held back; and what role the Department had played in criminal investigations involving fishing licences.

In response Ms Judy Beaumont, DDG: Oceans and Coasts, DEFF, said the department worked closely with the provincial authorities regarding marine protected areas management plans. This included Amathole (Eastern Cape Parks and Tourism) and Aliwal Shoal Marine. (Izimvelo KwaZulu-Natal).

Workshops at Amathole are taking place on 16 and 17 March, while the schedule for Aliwal Shoal is towards month-end. The approach in which the community

workshops are held, and social distancing, had resulted in the workshops taking place in either a remote setting, or virtually.

The Department also has detailed estuary management plans for each of the prioritised estuaries at Orange River Mouth, Buffalo River and Durban Bay. Each of these management plans has a number of annual targets, which are met by working closely with multiple stakeholders, provincial and local authorities.

Fishing rights allocation process (FRAP)

As usual there was nothing new in terms of FRAP 2021 deadlines for applications.

A question was raised about the single bid awarded under FRAP, why there was only one bid, and how many more were outstanding?

Ms Sue Middleton, Chief Director: Fisheries Operation Support, DEFF, told the committee that bids that were cancelled and re-advertised were for an implementer and information technology (IT) solution, and a panel of the legal law firm.

One bid that was outstanding was from the forensic auditors, which was less urgent.

In a commentary on Twitter, [Feike](#), notes the Department advertising for the appointment of a FRAP implementer and IT service provider this week.

[@Feikemanagement](#) write: "The FRAP implementer is charged with inter alia undertaking the 12 critical SEIAS, revising & drafting each of the policies, overseeing the allocation processes, translating of policies, supporting the consultation processes & providing overarching FRAP application support.

"There's no single FRAP implementer that can provide such a range of specialist yet diverse functions. The "FRAP implementer" is essentially an array of different

service providers – a business analyst, a public relations firm, specialist fisheries management & legal experts.

“Not to forget the uber specialist – the social and economics expert who must measure the socio-economic impact of each of the 12 fisheries on the local and regional economies in which each fishery operates. This task in itself is the most complex and foundational for #FRAP.

“The Dept’s TOR’s for these two service provider cats unfortunately confirm the extent to which it lacks the basic understanding of what is required to ensure a successful rts process. Should this FRAP ever happen it will make the failures of 2013 look like a huge success.”

Fishing licences

A question was raised about the role of the DEFF in criminal investigations involving fishing licences and why the process was delayed?

According to Middleton the role of fisheries in criminal investigations had been to hand over evidence to the Hawks and the South African Police Service (SAPS).

There are still administrative processes that need to be followed through from fisheries, she said.

Western cape small-scale fishing rights allocations

A question was asked about the need to redo the Western Cape’s small scale fishing rights allocations.

The Department has said repeatedly that the issues with regards to the setting up of fishing cooperatives in the Western Cape will only be resolved once the final list of successful small-scale fishers has been concluded.

Following multiple complaints received by the Minister from fishing community members about the lack of fairness and accuracy of the verification and declaration of small-scale fishers in the Western Cape, the Department of Environment, Forestry and Fisheries (DEFF) conducted an internal audit on the verification and declaration process in Western Cape.

Middleton explained that the internal audit on the verification and declaration process of small-scale fishers in the province, had revealed many issues related to service providers appointed.

She said each province has different service providers but in this case the verification process and the accurate capturing of information was highlighted. The adjudication of applications by a community panel (biases and gatekeeping), and the incorrect and incoherent way in which appeals were dealt with among the communities, were also concerns.

Asked if the Department would blacklist the service providers appointed in the Western Cape, Middleton confirmed the Department was taking legal action and that the programme was under way.

[Review of Western Cape Small-scale Fishing Rights](#)

General matters

On general matters she addressed the:

- Aquaculture Bill which has been in development since 2015. A virtual workshop was held in November 2020 and the next will take place on 20 June. After this the bill will be submitted for the parliamentary process to begin.
- Economic assessments. They are currently busy with the timelines. Internally the Department is reviewing Phase 1 of the economic assessments for all 12 sectors. [What's the Plan? FRAP 2020, 2021 or 2022?](#)

- Sector and general policies. The Department is also currently reviewing the 12 sector and general policies, as well as the fisheries policies. These will be ready for public consultations by the **end of April**. Middleton stresses that the amendments will begin only in the 2022/23 financial year. Priority is being given this year to concluding small-scale processors in the Western Cape.
- Over-expenditure of fisheries. Middleton explained that the over-expenditure of fisheries by 80%, as reflected in the CFO's report, was different from other branches because it dealt only with the cost of employment and capital transfers. She added that the financial statements regarding the expenditures will be tabled at the upcoming meeting on the Marine Living Resources Fund.

