

Bye-bye Minister Barbara Creecy, Hello Minister Dion George

By FINSA reporter -

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South Africa's fishing industry has a new Minister – again. Dr Dion George – a name the industry is not entirely familiar with – will be the sixth new Minister to take the wheel in the past 25 years. By all accounts his credentials are impeccable according to his political party, the Democratic Alliance, which he joined in 1995. Until now he has been the DA's Knysna constituency head, trying to resolve some of Knysna's environmental issues especially those around service delivery failures. At his side will be two Deputies.

It goes without saying the portfolio each (former) Minister for Fisheries has inherited has evolved over time, expanding with the increasing responsibilities that have come with it. In the process the name of the Department they have led has had to be altered to accommodate the changes. Long-timers in the industry talk fondly of Valli Moosa (1999-2004), tolerated Marthinus van Schalkwyk (2004-2009), were critical of the controversial and chaotic late Tina Joemat-Petterssen (2009-2014), weren't really able to get close to Senzeni Zokwana (2014-2019) who made some strange decisions, and were mostly disappointed by Barbara Creecy (2019-2024) whose focus was more on environmental and wildlife issues and climate change than fishing. Also in the mix were a couple of other faces holding environmental portfolios such as Buyelwa Sonjica (2009-2010), and the late Edna Molewa (2010-2018).

With each Minister having increasingly more to worry about, the fishing industry has, amongst other things, had to help itself find a way through the maze of new and evolving legislation, endure tiring rounds of ongoing consultations at all levels, be aware of political maneuverings, traverse tick-boxing exercises, and spend hours of time and money in the court system. All in an effort to reach consensus over the requirements of a government mandate the person in charge has had to achieve and deliver. That's before getting down to the business of fishing!

If there was one thing Barbara Creecy was not fond of it was wasting time in court! She will definitely be remembered for being hard working, but some sectors of the fishing industry wanted more from her than she was interested in giving and there are still several legal holes to plug that her predecessor did not resolve, nor she. For instance, there are numerous FRAP 2016 cases outstanding and at least three dozen review applications pending in just the hake long and small pelagic fishing sector.

Read the article [Minister's Lack Lustre Performance a Lane Duck Legacy](#)
Creecy moves on to the Department of Transport where she will hopefully be able to fix the mess that is roads, rail, maritime (shipping) and air.

Industry statements

While there is still clearly much to mend, the fishing industry body, FishSA, and the South African Deep-sea Trawling Industry Association (SADSTIA) have adopted a neutral stance.

FishSA says in a statement it “welcomes the appointment of Minister George, deputy Ministers Ms Swartz and Mr Singh. We look forward to the 7th executive administration and offer our support to all.

“The continuation of stability in the fishing industry is important as we enter into the 7th administration. We are going to work with the new Minister and offer our support as we look to grow the industry and attract investments, protect jobs and create an enabling environment for sustainable Fisheries.

“We wish the new Minister and his deputies well and we look forward to positive engagements similar to what we had during the tenure of the previous Minister.”
SADSTIA's statement follows similar lines: “We welcome the appointment of Dr Dion George as Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, and trust we can work with him and his Department in making a stable and thriving fishing industry a vehicle for the creation of quality jobs and upliftment of communities, whilst ensuring the ocean continues to provide resources for future generations of South Africans.”

Deputy Ministers

KwaZulu Natal-based, Narend Singh (IFP) and Bernice Swarts (ANC) take up the cudgels of Deputy Ministers, replacing Ms Maggie Sotyu who moves to the role of Deputy Minister of Tourism. How their tasks will be spilt remain to be seen.

Singh has a long history in local politics that dates back to 1988 but was only appointed to the National Assembly of South Africa in August 2007 following the death of Nhlanhla Zulu. He has been re-elected for every term of office since then and has served as the IFPs chief whip in the assembly and as party treasurer-general.

Bernice Swart has up until now served as Deputy Minister in Public Works and Infrastructure after having been appointed following a Cabinet reshuffle in March 2023. She is a senior official of the ANC.

There have been media investigations into the behaviour of both Deputies.

In conclusion, the appointment of Dr Dion George as Minister in the National Government of Unity (NGU), is clearly a strategic placement that focuses on his strengths: municipal governance, research, economic development, and finance. The latter is particularly important as it is a matter of record that over the years annual targets have not been met, budget have been cut, and there has been a massive amount of unaccounted-for spending by some departments in the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment.

Hopefully Minister George and his Deputies know something about fishing and will be able to swim with the rip tide! Time will tell.

- *More about Dr Dion George in an upcoming analysis*