



Media Release by the Namibia Nature Foundation

Ministry makes big strides towards more sustainable inland Fisheries

Over the December period the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources announced a number of important regulations that will help make inland fisheries more sustainable.

Globally fisheries are a source of food and income for hundreds of millions of people (estimated at 820 million), much of this relates to marine fisheries but inland fisheries are also very important, particularly in relation to livelihoods. Millions of people reap the benefits of fisheries from harvesting, processing to marketing and distribution. Not only is fishing a socio-economic gain but also a cultural identity to many communities around the world. In 2014, the annual world per capita fish consumption reached a record high of 18kg. To deal with this demand there was a surge in aquaculture, which now provides half of all fish for human consumption. Fish is one of the most traded food commodities in the world and half of this demand originates in developing countries. There is a remarkable potential for oceans and inland waters to provide food security and adequate nutrition now and especially in the future. Fish have a low carbon footprint compared to other animals we eat, thus proper management of these fisheries is important with the increased pressure from the global population, which is the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) recently forecast will reach 9.7 billion by 2050.

In Namibia fisheries are similarly divided between the commercially important marine fisheries and the inland fisheries which are of significant livelihood and cultural importance. In 2015 our National Statistics Agency recorded the fisheries sector as contributing to 2.9 % of national GDP, from which inland fisheries are formally recorded as contributing very little. But GDP, as is often cited, does not record informal contributions. In Namibia inland fisheries make contributions to food security and livelihood of communities particularly in the Zambezi and Kavango East and West regions; as well as being of cultural and recreational importance. Our inland fisheries have the potential to generate 5000 tonnes a year of high quality protein, through sustainable fisheries management.



In recognition of the importance of inland fisheries in Namibia, the Namibia Nature Foundation, with a multitude of donors and partners, has worked for well over a decade to understand the issues and promote solutions. The current European Union funded project, *Community Conservation Fisheries Project in the KAZA* (Kavango-Zambezi Trans-frontier Conservation) *Region* is a large trans-boundary project that emerged from a series of NNF projects that began in the early 2000's.

Through research and lessons learnt our interventions have evolved to help empower communities to initiate better management of their fish resources and in doing so improve their food security and livelihoods. Through our work we have advanced the understanding of the issues facing inland fisheries and together with our many partners have started addressing them.



There are many issues facing our inland fisheries, but for their sustainable management there are a few key issues that, if addressed, can go a long way to solving the problem.

The north east rivers systems are highly vulnerable to anthropogenic impacts, and particularly the risk of excessive fisheries exploitation. The fishing effort has



increased with uncontrolled exploitation and augmented commercialisation resulting in ever declining stocks and greater threats to local livelihoods.

One of the main drivers in the increased exploitation has been the change in fishing gear (equipment), where we have seen a major increase in the use of environmentally damaging monofilament nets. Monofilament nets are more efficient than multifilament nets, cheaper and less durable, so they are frequently discarded. When discarded they result in 'ghost-fishing' (i.e. continue drifting and catching fish) but also cause entanglement with other fauna such as birds, fish and snakes. Ingestion of such nets is of great concern to many more wildlife, including hippopotamuses. The monofilament nets eventually break down into micro-plastics, which cause more pollution and are harmful to organisms in the soil (long residence time due to slow degradation) and water. Research conducted through the NNF and on other projects has shown that there is a direct correlation between the use of monofilament nylon nets and the collapse of fish stocks. Another major issue in Namibia is that all of our perennial rivers are shared with neighbouring countries, where uniform control is difficult to achieve. A common resource that is shared between two or more countries opens up the source to a greater number of people, which leads to overexploitation; deteriorating catches for individuals, more nets used and decreased fish stocks and catch rates. This is particularly the case in the Okavango, Kwando, Chobe and the Zambezi systems.

Furthermore if we are to allow natural regeneration of fish stocks, fish require spatial and temporal protection, protected areas and closed seasons. It is self evident that fish need space and time during which they can breed without undue interference.

Over the December 2016 period the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources gazetted three important Regulations that go some way towards addressing these challenges and which mark a major step forward.

Firstly the Ministry has banned the use and sale of monofilament nets, this is a major step forward and if correctly enforced will, on its own, have major positive implications for fisheries and wildlife in Namibia. Secondly the Ministry has gazetted the Kasaya Channel as a Fish Protection Area; this includes the entire channel between the banks where it leaves the main Zambezi River course and the entrance to where the channel exits into the Chobe River. This formalises an earlier gazetting and adds to the existing Sikunga Fish Protection. Finally the Ministry has declared the Zambezi/Chobe River system in the Zambezi region as fisheries reserve with a closed season 1st of December to 28th of February.



Initially this included catch and release recreational angling, but following interventions by the NNF the catch and release prohibition will only be in the month of February, allowing lodges and communities to benefit from recreational fishing tourism in the December and January Period. This overlaps with the Zambian closed season and thus allows for simpler enforcement and greater protection.

These three regulatory moves, if enforced, have the potential to greatly enhance inland fisheries management, so where to next?

The Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources have shown great leadership in their actions with regards to regulations, for which we applaud them. But these regulations need to be acted upon and the Ministry should take on greater regional diplomacy to have similar regulations adopted in our neighbouring countries and within the Zambezi basin. We also have much more work to do in bringing on board the many communities to co-manage their fisheries not just in Namibia but in the region. Finally we have a lot of work to do in managing the life supporting international waters of the Okavango, Kwando & Zambezi systems.



The situation is dire but this move has been a game changer for fisheries management and the many partners in this are also playing their parts.

One has only to see the [Sikunga Fish Guards](#) Facebook site or watch the emotive video linked to the [Give the Rivers Back to Namibia Petition](#) to realise that ordinary people also care and we the people are acting.

This is about more than just fish this is about people, place, nature and life. It is about our place in the world, Namibia, and that special place in each of us that nature unlocks.

Let's keep up the momentum!

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About the Community Fisheries in KAZA Project

The community fisheries project in KAZA is run by the Namibia Nature Foundation. We are partners with the Department of Fisheries in Zambia, Okavango Research Institute and University of Namibia and work closely with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in Namibia, KAZA Secretariat, Fisheries Section Ministry of Environment, Wildlife, Tourism of Botswana and IRDNC, amongst many others.

Currently the community project is funded by the European Union with co-funding from SASSCAL, GoGreen/Nedbank, Millennium Challenge Account, NRF/SAIAB/Rhodes University, WWF and UNAM.

About the Namibia Nature Foundation

Founded in 1987, the primary aims of the Namibia Nature Foundation are to promote sustainable development, the conservation of biological diversity and natural ecosystems, and the wise and ethical use of natural resources for the benefit of all Namibians, both present and future.

The Namibia Nature Foundation has been a long standing partner of the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources in conservation matters in both the marine and inland fisheries.

To learn more about Namibia Nature Foundation, Namibia's leading conservation and sustainable development organisation visit www.nnf.org.na

Photography:

Photo_001: Makoros on the Zambezi (Photograph by: D. Tweddle)

Photo_002: The Sikunga fish guards (left to right) Patrick Situbeko, Albert Kamwi and game guard Robert Libebe (Photograph by:)

Photo_003: Makoro in Impalila Conservancy (Photograph by: D. Tweddle)

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