

A sustainable and well-managed fishery

The South African hake trawl fishery is certified by the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC), the world's leading certification and eco-labelling program for sustainable wild-caught seafood.

The fishery was first certified in 2004. In March 2021 it was re-certified for a fourth five-year period. During re-certification, every aspect of the fishery is assessed against the MSC Standard which has three core principles:

- **Sustainable fish stocks.** Are enough fish left in the ocean? Fishing must be at a level that ensures the fishery can continue indefinitely and the fish population can remain productive and healthy.
- **Minimising environmental impact.** What are the impacts of fishing? Fishing activity must be managed carefully so that other species and habitats within the ecosystem remain healthy.
- **Effective fisheries management.** Are operations well managed? The fishery must comply with relevant laws and be able to adapt to changing environmental circumstances.

The South African hake trawl fishery was the second groundfish fishery in the world (after New Zealand hoki) to be certified by the MSC. It was the first hake fishery and the first fishery in Africa to achieve the prestigious certification. Today it is one of 409 fisheries around the world that have been certified to the MSC's sustainability standard.

The blue MSC label is the world's most recognised and respected badge for sustainable, wild-caught seafood.



Photo courtesy Birdlife SA.

The Marine Stewardship Council

The Marine Stewardship Council is an independent non-profit organisation which sets a standard for sustainable fishing. Fisheries that wish to demonstrate they are well managed and sustainable compared to the science-based MSC standard are assessed by a team of experts who are independent of both the fishery and the MSC.



A suite of management measures

The trawl fishery for hake has been tightly managed and closely monitored since November 1977 when South Africa declared its exclusive economic zone under the United Nations Law of the Sea.

Today, the setting of an annual total allowable catch (TAC) remains the primary management measure for regulating the hake fisheries. However, a comprehensive suite of additional measures has been developed and implemented over time to address mainly socio-economic and ecosystem concerns. These measures are as follows:

- Restrictions on vessel power and size were introduced to the inshore trawl fishery in 2003.
- Capacity management measures were introduced to the deep-sea trawl fishery in 2008. Capacity-limitation models were developed by SADSTIA in partnership with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (now the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment) with the goal of avoiding fleet over capacity.
- Minimum mesh size regulations aimed at minimising the catch of juvenile fish were first implemented in 1974.
- Paired trawling was prohibited in 1977 in an effort to limit the impacts of fishing on the seabed.
- Restrictions on the lengths and hook spacing of longlines were introduced in 1994.
- Limits on the size and weight of bobbins and footropes were introduced in 2003, again in an effort to reduce the impacts of fishing on seabed habitats.
- Marine protected areas (closed to all forms of fishing) have been introduced for a number of reasons and some impact on deep-sea trawling. For example, a specific time/area closure is aimed at protecting kingklip spawning grounds.
- Ring fencing is a voluntary measure adopted by the hake trawl industry in 2008 to prevent the spatial expansion of trawling operations beyond areas that had already been impacted during the development of the fishery, to prevent further impact on the benthic habitat. The ring fenced area is monitored by vessel monitoring systems and compliance is good.
- Mitigation of seabird mortalities includes vessel-specific offal management measures, the mandatory deployment of bird-scaring devices (tori lines) and regulations regarding the greasing of trawl warps.
- Bycatch limitation measures have been introduced and include precautionary upper catch limits, "move-on" rules and restrictions on the proportions of by-catch species per landing.

Enforcement of regulations and permit conditions include monitoring of all landings, imposition of fines in the case of minor offences, or full legal action under Section 28 of the South African Marine Living Resources Act.



References

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Contact:

The South African Deep-Sea Trawling Industry Association
Tel: 021 425 2727 or 082 829 3911
Email: johann@sadstia.co.za www.sadstia.co.za



Unlocking the value of the Cape hake resource