

Crayfish off the menu as the poachers strike

WWF urges minister to implement recovery plan

BOBBY JORDAN

CRAYFISH are vanishing from some shops and becoming prohibitively expensive at restaurants as the delicacy is plundered in a free-for-all along the coast.

At least one retail chain is no longer stocking west coast rock lobster, and Woolworths is considering phasing out its stock too due to concerns over poaching.

The decision coincides with reports this week that about 50 tons of crayfish — more than the allowable catch — was hauled out of the ocean earlier this year because of the collapse of policing by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries.

The department confirmed a dispute with the company that provides fishing monitors, resulting in a free-for-all for 1 400 small-scale crayfish fishermen.

The blunder adds to concern over a dwindling crayfish population along the coast.

Fisheries officials have refused to lower the annual west coast crayfish quota, despite pleas by their own scientists, who are monitoring the situation.

World Wildlife Fund (WWF) marine manager John Duncan said the spotlight was on Fisheries Minister Tina Joemat-Pettersson, who has committed herself to a crayfish recovery plan.

"We are sitting at the edge of a cliff. Our rock lobster stocks, the direction of our policy and ... capacity to monitor and enforce the law is heading in a negative direction. We are pushing the minister to not just talk about a recovery plan, but actually implement it," said Duncan.

Joemat-Pettersson is under fire for the country's offshore fisheries patrol fleet, which has not been operating because of an R800-million fleet-management contract. The fleet is meant to safeguard South Africa's territorial waters from overfishing.

The public protector is investigating the contract.

Dennis Fredericks, the acting department head of inshore management, said this week the contractual dispute with the coastal

monitoring service meant the department had not been able to accurately assess the total rock lobster catch between March and June. But this problem had been resolved.

The WWF downgraded west coast rock lobster last year on its seafood sustainability index from green (species safe) to orange (species under pressure).

"We advise consumers to think twice about buying category-orange species," said Duncan.

Food Lover's Market has decided not to stock west coast rock lobster because of its commitment to sustainable seafood. "We will continue to do this until an improvement project is implemented to remedy the depletion of this resource," said spokesman Simon Wilson.

Woolworths head of sustainability Justin Smith said: "We are

looking at phasing out the sale of this product, in discussion with our conservation experts."

One crayfish costs up to R350 at an upmarket restaurant.

"We are at the mercy of the market when it comes to price, but mainly it seems to be going up," said Daniel Evans, general manager of Cape Town's Harbour House restaurant group.

Crayfish is the latest victim of the pillaging of marine resources. Six years ago the government suspended abalone fishing due to rampant poaching after the near disappearance of the species. Other fish species that are illegal to buy or sell include kingfish, musselcracker, kob and black-tail.

The crayfish shortage came to light this week at a meeting at which a government official briefed fishing representatives on a proposed plan to establish more than 143 small-scale fishing co-operatives along the coast.

Some community representatives say the government is bulldozing the policy without first ensuring that stocks are protected against poaching syndicates.

"The department has already [shown] they don't have capacity to implement it," said Pedro Garcia, chairman of the South African United Fishing Front.

Representatives say the government is bulldozing the policy without first ensuring that stocks are protected



RARE DELICACY: West coast crayfish is fast vanishing from South African waters — and dinner tables. Picture: ESA ALEXANDER



BRINGING BACK MEMORIES: Sophia Williams-De Bruyn with Adrian Steirn at the Union Buildings in Pretoria, the destination of a protest march on August 9 1956

The day 20 000 women said no to the dompas

THEKISO ANTHONY LEFIFI

FIFTY-seven years ago Sophia Williams-De Bruyn — along with Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa and other compatriots — led 20 000 women in a march to Pretoria's Union Buildings.

The women were out to defy the apartheid pass laws that restricted the movement of black people.

"I would do it all over again if I had to," she said this week, "but differently."

Williams-De Bruyn said

modern technology would have enabled her and fellow organisers of the march to mobilise a larger number than those who attended on August 9 1956.

At the time they relied on pamphlets and Joseph's car because she was the only person in the group with a vehicle. She reckons they could have brought as many as 80 000 women to the march.

She said she was humbled to have been chosen as one of the 21 Icons, a project masterminded by photographer

Adrian Steirn. "I hope it serves as an inspiration to others," she said this week ahead of being given the Freedom of the City award by Johannesburg.

The award was also given posthumously to Ngoyi, Joseph and Moosa.

The former deputy speaker in the Gauteng legislature said she had not set out to make history with the march — she just wanted to right a wrong.

"We did it with the purest of the heart... with a sense of

purpose," she said.

Steirn recently took her back to the Union Buildings for her portrait, which the Sunday Times publishes today.

In the portrait the 75-year-old is kneeling among rose bushes, holding a Bible — symbolic of the women's plan to kneel in prayer if officials attempted to break up the protest.

Steirn said he was looking for a portrait that showed the "absolute dignity and significance of that day. We were

trying to show the strength — and dignity — in how those women behaved."

SABC3 will flight a three-minute film of the shooting of the portrait tonight at 6.57pm.

Proceeds from the auction of the original signed portrait will be donated to the Sophia de Bruyn and Henry Benny Nato de Bruyn Legacy Foundation, a not-for-profit philanthropic endeavour that assists communities from which Williams-De Bruyn and her late husband come.

Swazi troops seize Shabangu's diamond mine

MATTHEW SAVIDES and SUTHENTIRA GOVENDER

CONTROVERSIAL property tycoon Roux Shabangu not only lost his landmark Pretoria building for a fraction of its value this week, but had an army march in to take over his diamond mine.

The Swazi army occupied Shabangu's Dvokolwako mine near Manzini after

the government revoked his mining rights. The army was sent in, according to the Swazi government, to prevent "illegal entry" to the mine.

On Wednesday, Shabangu's Sanlam Middestad building in Pretoria was auctioned for R66-million.

The building, one of the tallest in the capital, was valued at R850-million.

The Sunday Times has established that Shabangu lost his Swazi permit

because he missed several deadlines to start mining operations. The mine has potential reserves worth about R3.5-billion, according to the Swazi media.

Swaziland's senators expressed misgivings about Shabangu following accusations of corruption levelled against him in South Africa.

At the centre of the corruption allegations is the Middestad building, which went under the hammer after Shabangu failed to keep up payments

Shabangu, according to the newspaper, also warned that it would be unwise to let another company or investor "take over where [he] had already invested and not been compensated".

Dvokolwako mine, which is expected to produce more than 6 400 carats a month once in full production, was closed down in 2003 by its previous owners, TransHex Group, because of fluctuating diamond prices.