

## **Budget Debate on Vote 32: Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment**

### **Speech by Dave Bryant MP**

#### **DA Shadow Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment**

In his expose “Landscapes of Fear”, the investigative journalist Julian Rademeyer has revealed in detail, the criminal syndicates controlling rhino poaching and the illegal wildlife trade; from South Africa to China. These syndicates are directly connected to Mpumalanga’s murky underworld, which has been emboldened over many years by ANC-led state capture; and is characterized by ruthless assassins, cash-in-transit gangs, coal mafias and territorial rulers.

75% of Kruger National Park’s rhinos have been decimated by these syndicates since 2009.

82 vital game ranger posts remain unfilled in Kruger Park and this budget only provides enough money to fill a handful of them. Our wild rhinos are destined for extinction if we do not provide enough boots on the ground as soon as possible to take on the poachers.

Our endangered pangolin, abalone and succulents are also being targeted and being smuggled to China and more must be done to increase the pressure to curtail the domestic Chinese markets.

There is growing evidence from groups such as the Southern Ocean Coalition; of alleged Russian prospecting for gas in the Antarctic. This goes directly against decades old international treaties, signed by both South Africa and Russia.

However, the ANC claims to know nothing about these activities, and continues to proudly host Russian Antarctic research vessels in its ports. As we know these aren’t the only Russian ships it has been hosting...

Many of our traditional fisherfolk have lost their businesses and some have even been forced to sell their boats and small factories as a result of the drawn out and overly bureaucratic fishing rights allocation process. This process has been the most secretive and opaque since rights were allocated in a democratic South Africa.

This ANC government, through the FRAP process has severely compromised members of traditional fishing communities, particularly those in the Western Cape. Now we are told the ANC want to go further by destroying Coloured and Indian businesses by forcing racial quotas upon them in the fishing industry in some provinces via the racist Employment Equity Amendment Act Regulations.

The ANC should not be awarding fishing rights to anyone who is simply going to use those rights to dispense patronage or sell the rights off to the highest bidder. But the allocations in the tuna pole sector reveal that many fishers have been excluded and paper quota holders brought in. A

portion of the squid rights from the commercial sector were even assigned to the small scale co-ops just to inevitably be sold back to the commercial sector.

This is not empowerment. This government should be growing our local fishing businesses and increasing employment in the sector and no genuine fishing community should be shut out simply because of the colour of their skin. It is a scandal that this is even being contemplated.

We would urge the Minister to listen to the desperate pleas of traditional fisherfolk during the final phases of the appeals process as this is really their last chance to recover their businesses and their dignity.

As we know, the mess of the small-scale fishing process in the Western Cape was only resolved after the Minister was forced to take her own department to court but we still do not know whether the service provider responsible for screwing up the initial process has even been blacklisted by government yet. Furthermore, the public needs to know who really stands to benefit from the small-scale process and how much influence certain connected local ANC cadres will have in the local fishing cooperatives.

It is clear that centralised ANC control over the granting of fishing rights is destroying the industry. The fisherfolk of this country will be far better served if the Minister exercises her authority in terms of section 78 of the Marine Living Resources Act and devolves the responsibility for the granting of certain fishing rights to competent local authorities, such as in the DA-led Western Cape.

We must acknowledge that some steps have been taken towards addressing issues within DFFE's entities, but it often seems like one step forward and two steps back. After recovering from the impact of COVID and increasing its visitor footfall, SANBI has taken the bizarre decision, during a closed-door negotiation, to cancel a longstanding free entry agreement for members of the 110-year old Botanical Society. This will decimate BotSoc's membership and one can only conclude that there is some sort of an intention to collapse BotSoc at the expense of our botanical gardens.

As South Africa moves towards a Moonshot coalition government in 2024, it is essential that we do not take our focus off protecting our precious environment for generations to come. The DA is already doing this where we govern and we will continue to do so as the leader of a new national government in 2024.