



forestry, fisheries & the environment

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Ref: O2/1/5/2

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

(For written reply)

QUESTION NO. 22 {NW22E}

INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 1 of 2023

DATE OF PUBLICATION: 9 February 2023

Mr D W Bryant (DA) to ask the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment:

- (1) Whether, following recent reported incidents of conflict between wild seals and humans at South African beaches, her department has identified any verifiable evidence, locally or internationally, linking high levels of domoic acid or any other toxins present in water along the South African coastline with unprovoked aggression in fur seals; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (2) what total number of incidents of unprovoked aggression from seals towards humans is her department aware of over the past 10 years;
- (3) whether there has been any identifiable increase in incidents of aggression from seals towards humans in the past 10 years; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, what are the relevant details;
- (4) whether it is deemed necessary for her department to conduct any further assessments of seal behaviour; if not, what is the position in this regard; if so, (a) on what date(s) and (b) where will the assessments be conducted?

22. THE MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT REPLIES:

- 1) The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment (DFFE) or any other institution has yet to conclusively link aggression towards humans to domoic acid or any other neurotoxin poisoning. To be specific, the DFFE and/or associated stakeholders are yet to capture and test an animal that was involved with such aggression towards humans for conclusive testing. However, international investigations have linked the behaviour to domoic acid poisoning in sea lions in the United States of America.
- 2) Historical information is sparse, but the DFFE and associated stakeholders have confirmed at least 26 incidents since 2021. The areas affected covered False Bay (Gordon's Bay, Fish Hoek, Millers Point), Hout Bay, Table Bay (Bloubergstrand), and the most recent in Camps Bay (Clifton 4th Beach).
- 3) There is a perceived increase in the number of reported incidents in the past three years. Most reported incidents are centred around Hout Bay; an area with a breeding colony of seals around which a successful snorkelling industry operates. The DFFE has also noted that additional seal colonies have been establishing south of the west coast. This accidentally increases seal and human interactions as more seals have been seen in urban areas and/or areas of high human presence. In view of public concerns and keeping animal welfare in mind, the DFFE is keeping track of all reports of seal/human conflict through liaison and collaboration with municipalities, provincial and national departments, academia, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, non-profit organisations and private research institutes.
- 4) (a) Some of the participating institutions have preliminary results (linked to the mass die-off of 2021) that are currently being analysed. Ongoing research is based on available carcasses as DFFE do not do lethal research on mammals. No lethal sampling is being conducted at the moment, but research permits have been issued to a private research institution to assist with sample collection and monitoring. The State vet has been involved since the 2021 mass die-off.
(b) The DFFE is involved in ongoing multi-institutional investigations into this phenomenon. The DFFE is investigating a disease monitoring and surveillance MoA with

the Eastern Cape and Western Cape's State vet laboratories. It is envisaged that these agreements will ensure quick test results and associated interventions if needed.



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MS B D CREECY, MP
MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT

DATE: 21/2/2023