

**Ref:02/1/5/2**

**MINISTER**

**QUESTION NO. 546 FOR WRITTEN REPLY: NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

A draft reply to **Ms N V Nyambi (ANC)** to the above-mentioned question is enclosed for your consideration.

**MS ESTHER MAKAU**

**DIRECTOR-GENERAL (ACTING)**

**DATE:**

**DRAFT REPLY APPROVED/AMENDED**

**MS N P MOKONYANE, MP**

**MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**DATE:**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**(For written reply)**

**QUESTION NO. 546 {NW668E}**

**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 7 of 2019**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION: 08 March 2019**

**Ms N V Nyambi (ANC) to ask the Minister of Environmental Affairs:**

With reference to the recent expansion of marine protected areas to restore biodiversity and ecological wellbeing of the marine life, (a) what are the main benefits derived from supporting the ecosystems and (b) how will the expansion contribute to fishery sustainability in the country?

**546. THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS REPLIES:**

(a) The main benefits arising from the new Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) are:

* More resilient ecosystems. This means that widespread anthropogenic impacts such as climate change,ocean pollution and fishing will have less of an impact on our ocean resources;
* Protected marine species such as whales and turtles are still very vulnerable to habitat loss and human disturbance. Marine protected areas (MPAs) will serve as refuges for these organisms and others alike. This is particularly important during periods of breeding activity;
* Opportunities for eco-tourism on popular species like whales, seals, sharks, turtles and seabirds, are significantly enhanced in MPAs in two ways: firstly, there are generally higher numbers of these species in protected areas and secondly, the public and tourists want to see them in their natural environments (like seeing an Elephant or Lion in a National Park, and not in a cage in a zoo). Marine eco-tourism is a growing multi-billion rand Industry and supports thousands of jobs;
* Protecting marine genetic resources (including those of species which we still do not know about). However, we do explore these areas which are biodiversity-rich or otherwise important or unique. Some of these species found there have already been shown to have importance in medicine, such as anti cancer compounds, with biodiscovery into their uses still continuing; and
* Development of industrial activities outside MPAs (the vast majority of the ocean) can proceed with more confidence in the knowledge that good examples of the habitat (which may be impacted by development) are being protected within these areas. This does not exclude proper environmental management for all activities.

(b) The expansion of the Marine Protected Areas will contribute to fishery sustainability through:

* Protection of areas where fish congregate to breed so that successful breeding can improve fish stock numbers. Fish stock numbers are improved not only in the MPA, but also outside of it by the drift of fish eggs and larvae, as well as young fish migrations. These fish are then available to be caught outside of the MPA, thus enhancing the sustainability of commercial resources. A South African case study published in the top scientific journal, nature showed that this process indeed resulted in increased catch rates by fishers outside of the MPA;
* Recovery of stocks which are currently being over-exploited can occur more rapidly within MPAs, allowing certain fisheries to become sustainable once again;
* Protection and sustainability of key sea-bed habitat features such as coral reefs, some of which are important breeding or nursery grounds and would otherwise be impacted by activities such as trawling. International consumer and industry certification programmes recognise the importance of protected areas for sustainable fisheries. This certification is in fact a requirement for export to an increasing number of markets, and also results in good prices;
* Maintenance of biological and genetic traits of fish species (associated with ecosystem resilience) enhances sustainability;
* Some species of fish grow very slowly and are long-lived. Without the protection of MPAs, it is unlikely that fishlings of long-lived species would reach maturity. Without marine protected areas, these species are likely to become extinct. This includes some commercial fish species;
* Most of the new MPAs are designed with flexibility in mind, and allow fishing activities that have little impact on the main purpose of protection within the protected area. This includes a number of small-scale, recreational and commercial fishing activities that are allowed in different parts of most MPAs. These areas are called controlled zones, and the MPA regulations set out the activities allowed within these controlled zones. In restricted zones, it is generally only non-consumptive (ecotourism) activities that are allowed; and
* Activities such as mining are not allowed anywhere in MPAs, giving the Fishing Industry greater protection from the impacts of such activities, and thus also promoting sustainability.

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