

WOMEN FISHERS OF IMIZAMO YETHU
7787 O. TAMBO RD
IMIZAMO YETHU
HOUT BAY

29 JULY 2010

TO THOSE IN GOVERNMENT AND FISHERIES WHO CARE

**THE FORGOTTEN AND SIDELINED WOMEN FISHERS OF
IMIZAMO YETHU**

We, the woman of IY want to be heard. What we will have to say mustn't be said by men for us - We will say it ourselves. We all believe the correctness of this way. That's why we have a Youth League and a Woman's League each in turn to look after its own interests.

Let us talk about what we expect from Government.

Are you looking after the things in the sea that feed us and help us earn a meagre living?

Out of Fisheries' budget, hundreds of millions are spent on the very big ships that patrol the fishing grounds far offshore.

That is where the big white-owned and controlled companies make huge profits from hake. We can see that from their shares.

But let us not fool ourselves, those big red elephants are no good to protect the lobster and abalone that directly feed us.

Poaching of our inshore resources continues in a big way all the time, and Government seems unable to stop it.

Remember - those lobster and abalone - are the immediate resources of our fishers and they belong to all the people of South Africa and they are disappearing fast because of bad policies and poor policing.

Government and Administrators : Let the big boys do more policing of the hake themselves and throw your muscle behind the Coastal communities, so that we all have something to pass onto our children.

Another big slice of Fisheries budget is spent on their employees. Till very recently they have been strangers to us and stay isolated in their offices in Cape Town. They don't know the real people. They only know names on paper. They have to come out to our communities and find out face to face what is happening; otherwise you and we will become total strangers.

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Let us now focus on our own community :

In the past, before the M.T.R. and the L.T.R., there were many people, and many of them had nothing to do with fishing, going around collecting ID's and signatures from fishers" to help us get quotas" - so they said. They also took lots of our money that we never saw again.

Many of these vultures were filling their own pockets and using the real fishers to legitimize themselves.

Let us not forget what went wrong for all of us with the South African Commercial Fisherman's Association.

The big shots used most of the money for themselves and left nothing for us.

Now, there are some of the same and similar people coming into our community and doing as before. There are also individuals from our own community who do not work in a transparent manner. Meetings about our bread and butter, the small-scale fisheries, are held, we are not informed and when we are allowed to attend feedback is promised, but never comes.

Have these people got a different agenda to the pressing needs of the people? We have to be suspicious, especially when they want us to sign to give them our legal authorisation to act on our behalf while they say : " don't worry - we will look after you"

We have heard that before. That is why we have to participate at this early stage as the women of IY.

In the future, when we are respected and treated as equals, and have caught up the huge backlog and got rid of the big handicaps that women still have , compared to men, then and only then , can we join them as equals in one organisation.

A good example from the past of things gone wrong is Dicky Meter, the so-called Mayor of Hout Bay. He promised to help us all to achieve a better life. What he did was get quotas for himself and his wife.

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Nothing came for IY. He was then also too "good " for Hout Bay and he moved out. We don't hear or see him anymore. We believe his wife, through connections, built a huge factory in Hout Bay Harbour with I.D.C. money - Taxpayer's - the peoples' money - and now it lies abandoned and the local

People who worked there are now unemployed .

Some of us from IY recently applied for a right from the Department of Environment affairs. We were unsuccessful. We raised R2,000 and approached a respected law-firm who deal in Maritime matters.

There we were told that they were also handling other appeals in the same matter and some were costing as much as R50,000

For our R2,000 they will type our appeal and proof-read it.

The old lesson out of this is very clear. You can't have a fair soccer match when 6 year olds have to play against 18 year olds.

We can no longer play these games against a stronger opposition on our own. The partner we need has to be Government and there has to be the political will to change the status quo regardless of how many interdicts are going to follow . Things have to change .At Fisheries corruption and undercover influence from various stakeholders has to be rooted out.

Only then can honest people from the community deal with honest people from the administration and make positive changes.

As mentioned before, Fisheries is too isolated from the Coastal Communities, and the administrators rely on papers to check and verify. There are clumsy systems in place where sometimes up to 7 officials have to check and sign a document in turn , and all the while the fishers are ashore without an income And - this is the point - not one of the officials knows who she or he is dealing with - especially if they are " small " people .

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Instead a Department official should spend at least one day a week at a Coastal Community to get to know the real fishers as well as the fake ones that pretend to be genuine.

This official has to be someone from a distant area, - no brother or cousin checking on brother or cousin as it has been too often in the past.

The paradigm shift that the Draft Policy on small - scale Fisheries talks about must also be extended to the boats we can use.

There are too many regulations that stipulate for example : "vessel must be over 10m" ,or" vessel" must be over 9m" and for yet another "vessel must be under 8 m. "

Such policies ultimately lead to a huge waste of very scarce money when fishers have to get 3 different boats to participate in 3 different fisheries. With 3 repayments they probably won't make a success in any . Policies have to be simple and practical .

Young, mostly white independent skippers and boat owners survived and made a good living in the 80's and 90's against tough regime- supported big competition because they were allowed to fish all of : snoek, other line fish, tuna, squid, lobster, and small pelagic in the course of any one year with one and then same boat.

They made their boats pay by using them right through 12 months of the year. As an economist said ,they achieved economies of scale for their small businesses through multi-use boats and multi specie fishing . As an example at present: in the WCRL Offshore Fishery it is probably only the large companies like Oceana ,Lusitania ,Foodcorp etc with their large tonnages of their own and undercover allocations (belonging to them but still independent to the public eye) that achieve real economies of scale in that fishery .This allows them to also then take over the bulk of processing and marketing for the fishery .

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Getting back to multi-specie and multi-use boats :We can also benefit from such an approach as well as working through a co-operative or community organization where there is full use of expensive vessels .

We believe the same approach will work for processing and marketing. And please, in future, don't suggest that we work with big Co's. Those black people that did get fishing rights in 2005/6 often had to work with big co's. The big companies sold them the worst excess boats they had. These boats had to be fixed all the time and the new black boat owners had to lend more and more money from their big white" partners," and in the end they lost control of their allocations . There are more ways that black people have effectively lost their quotas, but that is for a different time.

Another thing we must not repeat can be seen in our fishing harbours. Real fishermen got allocations because they fished themselves and were good at it. They then bought big double cab trucks, stopped fishing, moved out of their communities and in some instances became owners that then also exploited their poor fishermen.

In future, if people with rights stop fishing themselves or don't pass the rights on to their children who continue fishing – then those rights must go to new young deserving fishers.

A further big concern that we women fishers from IY have , is that till now we have been overlooked totally. During previous interim reliefs there were approximately 37 women from Khayelitsha but none from our own community which is right next to the sea and was in fact born on the sanddunes of Hout Bay beach .Mostly African fishers wanted to start a proper family life within walking distance of the harbour . Many of their grandfathers were forced to live lonely lives far away from their families . They had to stay by themselves in an ugly compound under hangberg .

Regarding consultation and decision making about the new policies, there still are no women – to our knowledge – from IY involved .

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At a recent meeting at the Aquarium about our livelihoods – a group of us women were thrown out. We were told they could not accommodate us. This makes us wonder if there are people that are afraid of what we will say if allowed to speak .

We would not be surprised if the same thing happens at the summit in Somerset West.


On the positive side, we got new hope when a meeting with officials from the Department was recently held in Hout Bay . This was the first time ever that such a meeting has happened at our community . We were very pleased about that especially as we could talk to each other face to face .

There is also the matter of fishers with disability grants. These often come about from the tough life at sea. To us it is not fair that they should, in their difficulties – the disability grant is very small – be excluded from the new small scale plans.

Lastly there is still the matter of our future in 3 to 5 years time. Small-scale fisheries must not be a dead-end street. We also want one day to own and operate our own deep sea hake trawler. Then finally, we can join the white controlled companies that now monopolize the richest fishery of all in spite of , as our constitution says “ natural resources that belong to all the people of South Africa.”

We apologize for saying so much, there is a lot that we worry about and we have to say it.

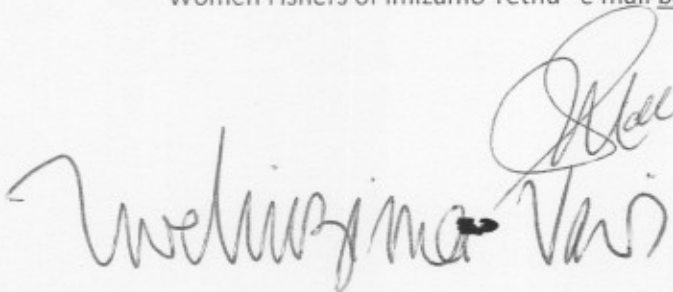
But we are very tough – believe us – with more hard work and help from the government – especially a willingness to listen to us, we will achieve our dream .

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