

Kicking up a storm

By Ian Cox

FISHING SURVEY 2015 / VISVANG OPNAME 2015

Dear angler,

This project, funded by the South Africa Fishing Tackle Agents and Distributors and the Department of Trade and Industry will help us provide policy makers with information on the socio-economic importance of recreational fisheries. This research will provide evidence to support the feeling that recreational fishing is important to the South African economy. Similar research has led to the formal recognition of recreational fishing as a valuable industry in other countries such as Australia, the USA and Mexico and has had positive outcomes for recreational fishing interests. The research will also assist fisheries managers understand the consequences of changes to regulations and improve the planning and management of recreational fisheries.

We have several prizes "up for grabs" for those who complete the questionnaire. In order to qualify please supply your contact details at the end of the questionnaire.

Please make sure that your web browser is up-to-date as it might cause problems with completing the questionnaire. We recommend using Mozilla Firefox or Google Chrome.

For questions email: Dr Warren Potts - w.potts@ru.ac.za

I tread warily into this topic aware that I have already stomped on a lot of toes and because I am involved in a process that is trying to fix the mess that I think is this survey. That said I have never believed in secrecy or in trying fudge what perhaps shouldn't be so here goes.

Recreational fishing was last surveyed in 2007 when research done by Professor Marius Liebold, for what was then the International Business Management Department at Stellenbosch University on behalf of the South African Deep Sea Angling Association, valued recreational fishing at 18 billion rands. That at the time made recreational fishing bigger than rugby and cricket combined.

That survey was criticised as being flawed. I don't know why this is so or if the criticism was justified but I think we can agree that it is time for a new survey. So last year the South African Tackle Dealers Association (SAFTAD) and its associated bodies the South African Sports Anglers Casting Federation (SASACC) and South African Consolidated Recreational Anglers Association (SACRAA) asked the Ichthyology Department of Rhodes University to undertake do an assessment of recreational fishing in South Africa.

This was the study that was launched on Facebook on 2 February 2016.

It is important to note that no stakeholders from fly fishing were represented on the project committee responsible for designing this survey despite the fact that fly fishing is treated in the survey as a separate fishing discipline or sector distinct from marine estuarine and fresh water angling. This is astonishing because other disciplines were represented by SACRAA as was SAFTAD who is largely paying for the study.

I knew that stakeholders from fly fishing had not been involved when I first saw the study on 2 February 2015. I did not however know that fly fishing had been what appears to be deliberately left out. It was nonetheless immediately apparent to me that the survey was prepared by someone who knew nothing about the fly fishing world and would result in fly fishing being undervalued so I posted on Facebook that I was inclined to boycott the survey.

Academics do not like the quality of their work being questioned by the non-academic community so matters went rapidly downhill from there.

FOSAF and Trout SA have subsequently got involved and are investigating. FOSAF has published the following communique on its Facebook page:

We refer to the Fishing Survey-2015 currently being circulated by Dr Potts of Rhodes University. FOSAF and Trout SA have now been contacted about the survey by the project manager and the issues around it will be discussed at the forthcoming FOSAF EXCO and TSA Mancom to be held shortly. Each organisation will consider the survey, its efficacy and related issues and decide a way forward which will be made public thereafter. In the interim it is recommended that our supporters and members wait until a recommendation has been made before completing the questionnaire.

I have since studied the survey in much greater depth and remain very concerned about both the quality and integrity of this research. I think it would be a crying shame if one apparently flawed survey is replaced by a survey that is definitely flawed. FOSAF and Trout SA are investigating. Hopefully their inputs will assist to address what in my opinion remains a serious problem.

In the meantime I watch and wait. I will report further next month.
