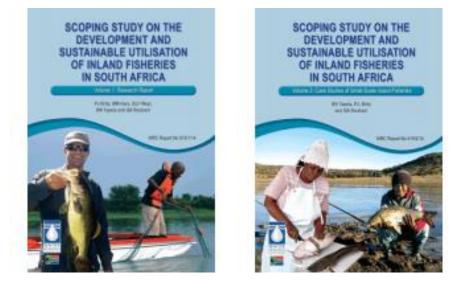
## New fresh water fisheries policy

By Ian Cox



Students members may recall that back in February I wrote that the Department of Agriculture Fisheries and Forestry was about to develop a fresh water fisheries policy. (Click here for the <u>article</u>) Well that process is now officially under way. The Water Research Commission recently invited key stakeholders to a meeting in Cape Town to explain and discus the policy. Interestingly the trout value chain was not invited. This has since been rectified with the result that Trout SA and FOSAF should both be represented at the meeting which is due to take place in Cape Town on 2 June 2105.

The fact that the trout value chain was not invited is a worrying sign. FOSAF has long advocated principled rights based approach to the management of South Africa's fresh water fisheries that recognises that this is a resource that needs to be shared equitably amongst all South Africans if it is to be managed sustainably. Trout SA has followed this policy. Thus both bodies defend the trout value chain as an example of South Africans exercising what are fundamental human right that cannot be deprived by the implementation of a permitting regime such as the one that was originally intended to do away with trout.

As a result both bodies strongly advocate the need to build ties between rural communities and trout fisherman. FOSAF's involvement in the Umngano Community Project and Trout SA's support through KZN Fly Fishing of the Thendele trout fishers are examples of this.

Early signs are that government through the Department of Environmental Affairs and DAFF seems likely to reject a rights based approach in favour of one where the right is replaced with a permit managed by criminal sanction. I say so because that is the regime which DEA applies in managing the environment. It is also the approach DAFF wants to use in managing aquaculture and it seems, given its announcements, agriculture in general. It also seems likely that the South African Consolidated Recreational Angling Association SACCRA will follow this

lead as they fear that allowing communities to exercise their right to share in these fisheries poses a threat to recreational fishing.

There are worrying signs that poor communities will react negatively to the approach taken by SACCRA. One has to be blind not to recognise the increased level of anger and frustration in poor communities. I was recently contacted by one such community who both warned me of this increasing frustration an asked if we could help in making their voices heard at least in the recreational angling community. I have assured them that I will try and do so.

I don't think it takes a rocket scientist to work out a policy of excluding poor local communities from what is a shared resource in favour of richer and lest face it much whiter communities is going to be doomed to failure. But paradoxically that is what government may be doing. I say may be but not because government has said as much. Indeed the advice they have received says the opposite. However the inevitable result of command and control regimes that ignores human rights such as that which characterised environmental management today is that ordinary people, especially those in rural communities. I can't see how this will be any different.

Perhaps it is because they are both marginalised communities but we now have the extraordinary situation where the interests of the trout value chain and the rural poor are increasingly aligning behind a shared need to protect the Constitution and the rights it promises against a government that is becoming increasingly hostile to those rights.