



HIGHLIGHT

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# SMART FISHING

The MSC-certified South African Hake Trawl Fishery is showing that responsible fishing means more than just maintaining healthy fish stocks.

“We used to worry about the hake quota and that would be it,” says Russell Hall. “Now that’s just one small part of a much bigger equation. If you want to stay in this business long-term you have to deal with every aspect of sustainability.”

Russell manages the trawling division of Sea Harvest, one of South Africa’s largest hake producers. He’s been involved with the company’s vessels for more than 20 years, but today finds himself devoting more and more time to things that don’t immediately seem to concern the day-to-day business of running a fishing fleet

Albatrosses, for example. The issue of seabirds getting caught up in fishing gear came to light when the South African Hake Trawl Fishery applied for Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) certification. A study found around 18,000 birds, including albatrosses, were being killed each year.

“It was a huge problem,” says Ross Wanless, who co-ordinates BirdLife South Africa’s work on seabirds in Africa. “Albatrosses are particularly vulnerable because they are large, aggressive birds

that dominate the access to food, and so are more likely to become entangled in the trawl gear. They are also of higher conservation concern, so the issue is most acute for them.”

Reducing seabird mortality was a condition of the fishery’s MSC certification. Working with WWF and BirdLife, the industry reacted quickly to introduce measures such as tori lines – colourful streamers flown from boats to scare the birds away. “Their introduction has reduced albatross interactions with fishing gear very significantly,” says Ross. As a result, what began as a voluntary initiative was incorporated into mandatory fishing permit regulations in 2006.

## FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

Despite these improvements, however, “it became clear that current regulations were not enough,” says Russell. “Unfortunately, it seems that by scaring the albatrosses away, we’ve opened the door for the smaller petrels and other species,” Ross adds.

## WWF TARGETS

- 2015** 25% of priority whitefish fisheries are either MSC certified or seeking certification.
- 2020** priority populations of Alaska pollock, cod, hoki, orange roughy, toothfish and hake are MSC certified, harvested without negative impact on the ecosystem and under implementation of a spatial area plan that protects vulnerable marine ecosystems.

## PROGRESS

- 29% of global whitefish is produced sustainably and MSC certified.

## PRIORITY COUNTRIES

### Production

Argentina, Chile, Canada, European Union, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, South Africa, USA, China .

### Markets

European Union (Germany, Netherlands, Spain, United Kingdom), Canada, Japan, Norway and USA.

### Present focal regions

Southern Africa (South Africa and Namibia), Latin America (Chile, Argentina, Peru and Uruguay) Arctic Seas (Russia, Norway, US), North Atlantic (Canada, European Union), New Zealand.

## CONTEXT

### Negative impacts

Overfishing due to inappropriate catch limits, enforcement and illegal fishing, fishing down the food web, habitat destruction, subsidies to increase vessel capacity, wasteful discards and bycatch of marine birds and other mammal species, use of unsustainable fishing gear which impact the marine ecosystem, and failure to set science-based catch quotas and recovery plans.

### Opportunities

Good management and responsible behaviour: Using ecologically sustainable quotas to manage fish stocks (rights-based management), reducing bycatch and discards through successful fishing gear, backed up by legislation, effective monitoring and control. Protect valuable habitats and species through ecosystem-based management. Sustainable sourcing through credible certification such as the MSC.

## TRENDS

### Demand drivers

Income, population, consumption.

### Geographic expansion

In the coming years WWF’s MSC whitefish work will focus on China, Japan, South Africa, Namibia, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Russia, and Peru.

This time, action was taken through the Responsible Fisheries Alliance (RFA) – a partnership WWF set up with four of South Africa’s leading fishing industry companies (Irvin & Johnson Ltd., Oceana Group Ltd., Viking Fishing Group and Sea Harvest Corporation) in 2009.

“A task team with representatives from each company, plus members of WWF and BirdLife South Africa, studied what more could be done to prevent interactions with seabirds,” says Russell. They looked at issues like where and when the lines were deployed, how offal – which attracts the birds in the first place – was discarded, and even what colour the lines should be (yellow appears best).

“What works on one ship may not work on another,” Russell explains. “The RFA engaged a consultant to see what was most effective for each class of vessel, spending time on 15 different vessel types.”

The RFA and BirdLife brought their findings to the government, which updated the permit conditions with immediate effect. Ross is hopeful this will make a difference: “The new permit conditions will ensure a more effective bird-scaring line design is used, and that the lines are deployed as soon as there is any risk to seabirds – which should drop overall

interaction rates, and albatross-specific rates still further.” Meanwhile, RFA members have replaced heavily greased trawl wires with ones using a thinner lubricant, which are less likely to trap small birds.”

## RAISED AWARENESS

The RFA runs a Responsible Fisheries training course, developed by WWF to help fishers and managers learn what an ecosystem approach to fisheries is all about. Several hundred people have attended, including many fishing boat captains and crew.

“It’s created tremendous awareness,” says Russell. “If skippers are interested, and coming back to you with issues and ideas, that’s how things will be resolved. Good practices become daily habits.”



The Marine Stewardship Council exists to contribute to the health of the world’s oceans by recognizing and rewarding sustainable fishing practices, influencing the choices people make when buying seafood, and working with our partners to transform the seafood market to a sustainable basis.

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*“Markets and consumers today are more environmentally conscious. This is why the trawl industry pushed hard to obtain MSC certification for its target species, hake. The MSC label is very important to us as an exporter, so any issue that affects our accreditation is important.”*

Russell Hall  
Trawling Division Manager  
Sea Harvest Corporation



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To stop the degradation of the planet’s natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.

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