



MEDIA RELEASE

Bulk seabed mining poses significant risk to South Africa's fishing industry

[Cape Town, 11 October 2016] On the eve of National Marine Week from 10 to 14 October 2016, many South Africans are unaware of a looming threat to the health of our country's natural marine resources in the form of bulk seabed mining of phosphate minerals for use as fertiliser.

A new report has found that prospecting rights granted to three companies over the past five years are in an area that overlaps with a significant part of South Africa's largest fisheries.

Among the concerns related to bulk seabed mining are the use of destructive technologies to excavate the seabed with limited knowledge of its potential environmental impact as well as the proposed scale and location of the mining activity.

The Safeguard our Seabed Coalition, an initiative led by the Centre for Environmental Rights (CER) in partnership with WWF-SA, is now calling for a moratorium on marine phosphate mining in South Africa.

A study commissioned by the CER and supported by Coalition partner, the Responsible Fisheries Alliance (RFA), focused on determining the socio-economic benefits of South Africa's fishing industry and other marine uses in the context of marine phosphate mining.

Undertaken by the University of Cape Town's Environmental Policy Research Unit under the aegis of the CER, the report found that the prospecting areas and proposed drill sites coincide with a significant portion (77%) of the offshore hake trawl footprint and one of the primary fishing grounds of the small pelagic fishery.

Furthermore, the feasibility studies undertaken to support comparable proposals for marine phosphate mining in other countries indicate that the employment potential of bulk marine sediment mining is marginal – generating possibly only 40 to 50 jobs per mining vessel. This is in sharp contrast with the existing direct employment of 27 000 jobs created in the fishery sector and indirect employment of around 100 000 jobs created in industries linked to the sector.

In neighbouring Namibia, a similarly proposed marine phosphate mining project known as Sandpiper, which was aimed at dredging 5.5 million tonnes of sediment annually, would have only provided about 135 permanent jobs.

Lastly, while prospecting licence holders argue that there is an impending shortage of phosphate for agricultural processes, an additional study undertaken by UCT indicates that no shortage exists in South Africa. There is good reason to believe that the phosphate

mined at huge cost to South African oceans will simply be exported for profit. According to the study, there are viable alternatives for ensuring continued phosphate supplies, including phosphate recovery from wastewater systems and improved soil management in agriculture.

Spokesperson for the Coalition, Saul Roux, says, 'During this week South Africa pays tribute to the importance of our oceans for sustainable development, food security, cultural heritage and recreation. The health of our country – our people and our environment and therefore our economy - depends on the health of our ocean. We have a duty of care towards our ocean, both for its intrinsic value and for our own well-being. We should not be blind to the socio-economic and environmental risks of activities that happen out of our sight, beyond the shore. The potential risks of bulk marine sediment mining to our marine ecosystems and renewable industries, such as fishing, are simply too great. The proposal to dredge our seabed should not be allowed to proceed unchecked.'

Note to editor:

Marine sediment mining:

Over the past five years, the Department of Mineral Resources has granted three prospecting rights to private companies for the extraction of marine phosphate from the ocean floor (also known as bulk marine sediment mining).

Safeguard our Seas Coalition: The coalition includes organisations that represent the interests of commercial and small-scale fishing, organised labour, and environmental justice organisations.

<http://cer.org.za/safeguard-our-seabed/safeguard-our-seabed/who-is-the-safeguard-our-seabed-coalition>

The studies mentioned above can be accessed through the following links:

[CER \(2016\) *Valuing the socio-economic contribution of fisheries and other marine uses in South Africa*. Environmental Economics Policy Research Unit, UCT.](#)

[CER \(2016\) *Assessing the desirability of marine phosphate mining amongst strategies for a sustainable supply of phosphates*. Environmental and Process Systems Engineering, UCT.](#)

Marine Week: National Marine Week is celebrated annually during the second week of October. This is an Environmental Awareness Campaign driven by the Department of Environmental Affairs, through its Branch: Oceans and Coasts. Its purpose is to create awareness of the oceans and coastal environment, the promotion of sustainable utilization and conservation thereof, for the benefit of all. It endeavours to bring the science alive to allow politicians, the public and the young to understand the value of the role of the oceans. – SA Environmental Affairs website

Issued by: The RFA on behalf of the Safeguard our Seabed Coalition

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