

POSITION STATEMENT

Aquaculture

INTRODUCTION

Aquaculture contributes to food security and is an important driver of economic development. However, malpractice can lead to significant consequences for the environment in which it takes place.

BIRDLIFE SOUTH AFRICA POSITION STATEMENT

BirdLife South Africa acknowledges that a sustainable aquaculture industry has the potential to assist with socioeconomic development, increase food security and relieve pressure on wild marine stocks. However, we are concerned about the potential negative environmental impacts of farms. BirdLife South Africa are in favour of applying environmental risk assessments and appropriate risk mitigation strategies to all aquaculture operations. We further support operations that are appropriate in scale and in non-vulnerable ecosystems. The South African aquaculture industry should be driven and managed by a comprehensive plan that promotes sustainable development and rural economic growth without compromising the marine environment or degrading coastal habitats. This ethos is captured in the certification processes of the Aquaculture Stewardship Council (www.asc-aqua.org).

Aquaculture can be characterized both by its location (land-based or in-situ aquatic farms) and the stock (typically fish, shellfish, or algae). Land-based farms have fewer potential consequences for local ecosystems due to their containment, however there are concerns around water usage and recycling as well as energy requirements. Aquatic farms can have different consequences depending on their form. Open net cage fish farming, in particular, can be a destructive practice which has caused widespread negative environmental and socioeconomic impacts in other countries. The South African coastline is generally unsuitable for sea-based aquaculture due to rough sea conditions, with the exception of a few harbours and natural bays. Within these sheltered marine areas there are sensitive and critically important ecosystems that support threatened seabird species and associated prey species. It is important that these areas are not adversely impacted by aquaculture.

BirdLife South Africa is therefore opposed to open net cage aquaculture and other aquaculture practices where potential negative environmental impacts on the marine environment exist. Site-specific environmental impacts could include:

- Localised pollution caused by fish excreta, anti-fouling agents, antibiotics and excess feed
- Disease outbreaks and parasites
- Accidental escapes

General concerns include:

- The use of already depleted endemic fish stocks as feed for predatory fish

- Privatisation of coastal property for processing plants with no public benefit
- Displacement and impacts on local fisheries (commercial, recreational and subsistence)
- Impacts on seabirds and other marine predators, especially near to breeding colonies. These could include, but are not limited to, entanglement, displacement of birds from foraging areas, depletion or displacement of local prey stocks, disruptions to the local ecosystem, and disturbance impacts.

BirdLife South Africa, acknowledging the need and desirability for sustainable fish supplies and enhanced food security, does support an aquaculture industry that achieves the following:

- Does not degrade the marine or coastal ecosystem
- Is not established adjacent to bird breeding colonies
- Is not established within endangered or threatened ecosystems
- Does not harm endemic wild fish stocks
- Uses traceable and sustainable sources of feed
- Does not harm traditional coastal industries
- Promotes transparency and access to information
- Fair and equitable decision-making with public participation processes in place
- Ensures sustainably produced fish that does not diminish the ability of future generations to access marine resources
- Is established in areas that are not opposed by local communities
- Is in harmony with current economic, cultural and social practices
- Complies with the international and local regulatory frameworks
- Is certified by the ASC

Aquaculture can only successfully contribute to global food security if it does not deplete or adversely impact marine resources and environments. Future aquaculture developments should only occur within an enforced regulatory system and planning framework that recognises and accounts for the sustainable management of marine ecosystems. All environmental impacts of aquaculture must be understood, and a sensitivity mapping process must be in place. The South African aquaculture industry must engage openly with NGOs and marine biologists in participation schemes to benefit the environment and the future of sustainable aquaculture.