



MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release

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Initial response to Ministerial Brief on the release of the Expert Review Panel's report and the Minister's decisions on African Penguin conservation and fisheries restrictions around major colonies

BirdLife South Africa, as part of the Conservation Sector group that took part in the deliberations of the Expert Review Panel (ERP) on African Penguin conservation as it relates to the impact of purse-seine fisheries restrictions, welcomes the release of the international panel's report. Based on the brief by the ERP chair and the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Ms Barbara Creecy, today, we have the following preliminary comments:

1. Based on a summary of the findings of the Expert Review Panel presented by the chair Prof. Andre Punt, BirdLife South Africa would like to commend the Panel for what appears to be a detailed and balanced assessment of issues related to the impacts of resource competition on Endangered African Penguins around their major colonies in South Africa. Based on the evidence submitted to the Panel and the manner in which the proceedings were conducted, we feel that they have provided a well-balanced summary of the issues at hand.
2. The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment is to be commended for initiating this process and for highlighting the importance of African Penguin conservation and the sustainable management of their principal prey, sardine and anchovy.
3. Together with our partners in the Conservation Sector group, we will carefully review the Panel's report and evaluate the current closure extents in the context thereof. These will be assessed against the criteria related to cost-benefit assessments – costs and benefits to both penguins and the fisheries sector – that the Panel report has recommended and the potential for these closure extents to alleviate resource competition around major African Penguin colonies.
4. The Conservation Sector group has previously [highlighted](#) its concerns regarding the interim closures and their adequacy in protecting the six remaining large African Penguin colonies. These concerns are especially relevant for colonies at Dassen Island, Robben Island and Stony Point, with the latter two colonies having the smallest proportions of penguin habitat protected by these restrictions.
5. We welcome the Minister's decision around the timeframes for long term closures, i.e. 10 years, with a review after six years. Provided that the ultimate closure extents that are implemented are aligned to the foraging habitat needs of these birds, this timeframe will afford African Penguins a better chance of population recovery, especially given that African Penguins only start breeding at an age of 3-6 years. We also support the decision to

implement year-round closures given the importance of the closure areas for other important penguin life stages (such as pre- and post-moult and juveniles).

6. The Panel highlighted the importance of an effective monitoring and evaluation programme to monitor the effects of future fisheries restrictions on penguin population recovery. The Panel recommended the use of weighbridges and pit-tag readers to monitor the condition and survival of penguins. BirdLife South Africa together with its partners SANCCOB and Nelson Mandela University have installed Automated Penguin Monitoring Systems - which use both weighbridges and pit-tag readers - at several colonies which will help achieve this recommendation.
7. As the Minister's statement highlighted, the closures do not alleviate the need to address the other threats facing African Penguins, such as ship traffic (together with associated noise and vibrations), pollution and degradation of suitable nesting habitats.

We look forward to reviewing this much-awaited report and will release our more detailed comments in due course, after having thoroughly considered its contents.

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