

News/South Africa

Permitted to fish

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Subsistence fishermen and women on KwaZulu-Natal's north coast will be allowed to harvest mussels and bait as of Sunday as part of the overall transformation of fisheries in South Africa.

It's illegal to harvest brown mussels and red bait, but deputy environmental affairs minister Rejoice Mabudafhasi will issue exemptions to the Sokhulu Buhlebemvelo mussel committee, most of whom are women, on Sunday.

These are the first such exemptions in the province since the promulgation of the Marine Living Resources Act that came into effect in September 1998. It will also be the first time Sokhulu fishers are legally allowed to harvest these types of marine life and the first time the committee is recognized as a formal sector.

According to Ezemvelo Wildlife spokeswoman, Maureen Mndaweni, it was previously difficult to grant fishing rights to the Sokhulu community because there was very little information about them and management systems hadn't been developed yet.

The original goal was to issue the first permits to subsistence fishers in 2001 after the chief director of Marine and Coastal Management (MCM) appointed a subsistence fisheries task group (SFTG) in December 1998.

The task group submitted recommendations to the MCM in January 2001 on ways to implement subsistence fisheries management systems. The recommendations were accepted and a feasibility study and business plan were developed.

A large proportion of subsistence fishers were identified as living on the east coast where MCM has almost no capacity or systems in place to manage the use of resources," Mndaweni said.

In 2000 the Norwegian Agency for Development (Norad) granted donor funding to MCM for five years to implement a subsistence fisheries national

management programme. The programme aims to create a unit to handle regional management issues together with MCM and to identify subsistence and small-scale commercial fisheries in KwaZulu-Natal. It also aims to develop management plans for each subsistence and small-scale commercial fishery in the province to identify management and research actions necessary for implementation.

The process of identifying subsistence communities has been completed and 80 per cent of the communities have received training on the new policies and their legal implications. The remaining exemptions will be issued to communities during 2003.