

A PASSION FOR SUSTAINABLE CONSERVATION POWERED BY A PASSION FOR EXCELLENCE, INNOVATION AND RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

Knysna is a great place to live and visit with an abundance of activities from hiking and cycling within the surrounding natural forests to scenic drives and great restaurant experiences. But without doubt one of regions greatest attractions is the Knysna Lagoon and estuary for both water sport and fishing enthusiasts. It's therefore a paradox that our greatest attraction ultimately faces great pressure from our own use.

Estuarine fishing has historically been a popular activity for both coastal residents and visitors, being particularly active areas for both recreational and subsistence anglers due to the abundance of fish, the ease of accessibility and the protected waters. In general trends indicate that within South Africa estuarine angling has increased in popularity, particularly since the ban on beach driving and this trend is likely to continue.

SANParks, with the help of Honda Marine Knysna through their donation of a 4.5m semi-rigid inflatable with a very efficient Honda BF 50 four stroke outboard, are monitoring the amount of fishing activity occurring within the Knysna estuary. During these surveys anglers are counted and interviewed with a view to find out the numbers of anglers, the times spent fishing and the number, size and species of fish caught. The idea is to build up a picture of where fishing effort is occurring, when, how much and what fish are being caught. By implementing a long term monitoring program both temporal and spatial trends can be picked up (i.e. is fishing effort increasing and what happening to catch rates?) which can then feed directly back into our management efforts.

Sadly, and of great concern, stock assessments on a number of our important linefish species (those caught by hook and line) have indicated that nationally they are experiencing heavy over-exploitation and in some instances this has lead to a stock collapse. Included in these species are white steenbras and dusky kob, both of which utilize estuaries as both nursery and feeding areas and consequently impacts on estuaries ultimately impact the entire stock. Stock assessment models for these two species indicate that the adult breeding numbers have decreased by between 95 and 98%! In other words we are currently sitting with between 5 and 2% of adult fish compared to historical times! Can you imagine the outcry if it was announced that adult lion, rhino or elephant had been reduced to only 2% from historical levels.

One sentiment often expressed to me during the angler interviews is the viewpoint of "What impact can I as one angler have?" My answer is to say it's not only about what your individual impact is but rather what your impact plus the other 700 000 odd recreational and subsistence anglers within South Africa. It's human behavior to get so wrapped up in our own worlds that we forget to see what's happening around us. For example, and these are only preliminary results, for the month of September 2009 the average number of anglers counted on Knysna during any week day was 44 whereas on weekends this shot up to 124. When we use these numbers to estimate the total number of angler outings for the month (one angler representing one outing) we get a total of

2040. Now that's only angler outings, so if we use this and multiply it by the average time spent fishing by each angler (individual times taken as the time spent per angler multiplied by the number of lines in use) we get an estimation of the angler hours for the month. This September, which included school holidays and a public holiday, the estimated total angler effort came out as 18 638 angler hours! That is a lot of fishing effort on one estuary, and it's all made up of numerous individual fishing trips.

Knysna estuary has been rated as the most important estuary in South Africa due to its size, habitat importance, zonal type rarity and biodiversity importance. But it is also an estuary under immense pressure from a number of sources. In ending I urge all of us to look beyond ourselves, analyse our actions and think about how we can play our part. It will take the commitment and involvement of each of us to keep Knysna as both the number one estuary in terms of biological importance and also as a great place to visit and live. The possibilities are endless and working together towards a joint goal we can make a difference.