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## Esau admits pilchard fisheries gamble

News - National | 2017-02-15

by [Shinovene Immanuel](#)

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Bernhard Esau

**FISHERIES minister Bernhard Esau admitted this week that it was a gamble to continue to allow the catching of pilchards, but he stood by his decision to allow the fishing of the species.**

*The Namibian* reported last week that Esau ignored advice from fisheries scientists and marine officials, and is pushing ahead with the allocation of pilchard quotas, a species declared as “depleted” and in danger of extinction in Namibian waters.

The article appears to have infuriated the minister, who has labelled it unfair. An angry Esau initially did not want to talk to this reporter when approached at a public gathering on Tuesday after the opening of parliament.

He, however, changed his mind a few seconds later, and explained that he did not want to be known as the minister who would be remembered for depleting Namibian pilchards.

“That article was subjective. You editorialised the story. It was a sensational story,” Esau said while shaking his head.

Even though the minister did not dispute the main points of the article, namely the declining pilchard stocks and ignoring

the scientific warnings, he stated that his ministry took a conservative approach by not banning the fishing of pilchards because of several reasons.

He said 4 000 metric tonnes of the 14 000 metric tonnes of pilchard to be caught this year would go to researching the pilchard stock, while 10 000 metric tonnes was for rights holders.

Esau said the research would focus on whether pilchards were indeed retreating into deeper waters, or whether it was a groundless perception.

“Yes, it’s a gamble,” he said, quickly adding that the same could be said of other fish species as well.

Esau has been accused of advancing the interests of fishing companies by not heeding scientific advice to put the brakes on pilchard fishing.

The minister said his decision was based on his consultations with the Marine Resources Advisory Council, made up of scientists, trade unionists and other officials.

He said his decision could not have been made based on the sentiments of one disgruntled official.

Pilchard is a popular fish species in Namibian households, and is canned and distributed under such well-known brands as Lucky Star.

A fisheries expert told *The Namibian* last week that “the sardine stock size is currently estimated at virtually zero level, and the natural mortality is considered to be very high, while recruitment has been poor for five consecutive years”. The permanent secretary in the ministry of fisheries, Moses Maurihungirire, also attempted to explain why Esau and his team were not mistaken in their approach.

He said fears created by the media to imply that pilchard stocks were not being managed in a sustainable and responsible manner were incorrect.

Maurihungirire explained in an advert published in newspapers on Tuesday that they considered several factors before pushing ahead with the exploitation of pilchards.

He said pilchard stocks were mainly affected by fishing pressure, environmental changes such as sea surface temperatures and sea upwelling, which affected food production for pilchards, and the predation of pilchards by seals, sea birds and other predators.

The PS admitted that pilchards had suffered unsustainable harvesting in the past, which resulted in a drop in catches from over one million tonnes in 1968 to less than 50 000 metric tonnes in 1990.

“There has been a report of some by-catches of pilchards by fishers trawling deeper and further offshore than traditional pilchard sites and depths, an indication that, among other factors, Namibian pilchard stocks may be located deeper and further away,” he noted.

He said the fisheries ministry had observed that the natural mortality of pilchards was quite high.

“This volume of fish will be removed by natural mortality, even if it is not allocated via the total allowable catch process,” he added.

Etosha Fishing's managing director, Pieter Greeff, last week said seals were also consuming more fish than what companies were catching per year.

“Seals are going to eat the fish anyway. Seals are eating pilchards more than what the entire fishing industry is catching,” he stated.

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- When is this RAPE and ABUSE of all living things (including earth's resources) in Namibia going to stop? It is at the core of ALL Namibias problems (including financial/economic). Have these people ever heard of naturally sustainable ecosystems? If you rape one resource, the ecosystem has to adjust. Seals are as much part of the ecosystem as pilchards are - to blame the seals for eating pilchards is ABSURD! - Emily Schneider-Waterberg  
Schneider-Waterberg | 2017-02-16 17:12:13 [60319]





