Massive fishing study casts off

By DAVID MACGREGOR
Senior Reporter

The first national study on the financial contribution that recreational fishing makes to the South African economy has started. Rhodes University and four other research institutes have teamed up with the government and the fishing industry to try and work out how much recreational fishing is worth to the country.

The fishing tackle industry was estimated to be worth R210 million in 2012 but little is known about how much the more than 800,000 local and international anglers contribute on top of that.

Project leader De Warren Potts yesterday said working out the economic impact was critical as it would provide policy makers with information on the socio-economic importance of recreational fishing to assist informed decisions on fisheries management.

"Currently recreational fisheries regulations are controlled by the biology and stock status of the fish and little regard is paid to the social and economic consequences of these changes.

"This has to change as fisheries management is as much about understanding the human dimension as it is the fish," the Rhodes expert said.

The two-year study will highlight the recreational fishing industry’s contribution to the national economy through retail sales, tax revenues, job creation and income generation. "The research will be conducted on the entire coastline including estuarine and freshwater fisheries too — a massive task," he said.

The research will be done by Rhodes University, the University of Cape Town, North-West University, the South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity and the Oceanographic Research Institute. Potts said the research would include various sectors: rock and surf, deep sea, jet ski, fishing ski, charter boat, spearfishing boat, spearfishing shore, estuary shore, estuary boat, freshwater fishing and flyfishing.

"We know the economic impact is huge and that recreational fisheries are critical for job creation in the formal and informal sectors.

"Getting an idea how big the economic impact is — that’s the main aim."

He said the fact that many poor people were recreational fishermen who caught to eat emphasised the importance of properly managing the sector.

"Recreational fishing has a major impact on fish stocks. "Anglers always believe that they cannot dent the fish populations and as an individual this is probably true."

But as a group recreational fishers, because of their huge numbers, can do massive damage to fish stocks."

Previous economic research has focused largely on the commercial sector and this has been used to guide recreational fishing policy.

Dr Aidan Wood of the South African Consolidated Recreational Anglers Association said the results of the research would reveal what may be lost if the sector was not equitably considered in decisions around rights allocation, industry restructuring and the distribution of resources.

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