

MEDIA RELEASE - 2 August 2002

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS AND TOURISM

MOOSA SUSPENDS JAPANESE FISHING IN SA WATERS

Since 1977, up to 200 Japanese and Taiwanese fishing vessels have been issued with annual fishing permits to catch tuna in South African waters. This figure has been greatly reduced over the past few years to the current level of 55 permits for Japanese vessels and 12 permits for Taiwanese vessels. The bi-lateral agreement with Taiwan has already been cancelled, effectively ending Taiwanese fishing in South African waters when the last permits expire at the end of this year.

The Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Valli Moosa has announced the phasing out of the agreement with Japan and in so doing, is only renewing the fishing permits for 50 Japanese vessels which will be valid only for a further 6 months, after which the agreement terminates. These permits will be issued to Japanese vessels subject to certain conditions. These include the requirement that each vessel must carry an observer and must be fitted out with Inmarsat C vessel monitoring equipment that automatically reports the vessel's position to the Department. Moosa stated that "South Africa's fishing resources are for exploitation by South Africans. There are a number of South Africans who have the ability and knowledge to properly exploit this valuable resource on a sustainable basis". This underlines the Department's clear policy of preventing foreign access to resources in South African waters.

In return for allowing the Japanese and Taiwanese to catch South Africa's highly lucrative tuna resources, the Japanese and Taiwanese governments have paid annual permit fees of approximately R9 million. In addition, South African ports and harbours frequented by the distant water Taiwanese and Japanese fishing fleets have benefited economically by offering cold storage, refuelling, and specialised repair services. It is not expected that the local ship repair industry will be adversely affected, since large numbers of foreign fishing vessels operating on the high seas in the Indian and Atlantic oceans will continue to use South African ports as the preferred ports for such services.

The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism has been conducting an experimental tuna longline fishery during the course of the last few years, the aim of which is to develop a fully-fledged commercial tuna fishery. The participating local tuna longline fishing industry is anxious to exploit this resource without competition from foreign vessels and is determined to compete on the international market by delivering the highest quality product. Recently there has been a greater degree of investment by South African interests in the tuna industry and the South African fleet can now rank as fully fledged distant water fleet. Moosa added that "it is an objective to develop under utilised fisheries in order to broaden access for participation by South Africans".

Emphasising the objectives of NEPAD, Moosa said that "allowing foreign fishing fleets access to fish in South African waters undermines the ability of coastal developing states to develop their own fisheries".

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