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The origins of the present: economic conflicts in the fisheries of the South African south coast, circa 1910 to 1950

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Abstract

This study investigates the historical roots of the conflict between commercial handline and inshore bottom trawl fisheries on the eastern Agulhas Bank off the southern Cape coast. It focuses on the early 20th century, particularly on the regional centre, Mossel Bay, and on Still Bay, a small town which until recently had an important handline kob fishery. The transport opportunities offered by the commercial harbour and railway line encouraged the establishment of industrialized fishing at Mossel Bay. In contrast, the Still Bay fishery originated in the river as a development of the local agricultural economy, only later pushing out to the sea. Marketing was always hampered by the remoteness and the lack of efficient transportation and refrigeration facilities. Although Mossel Bay handliners had access to ice and transportation, the marketing arrangement of the large trawl companies effectively excluded them from entering markets further afield. Monopolistic vertical integration by the country's largest trawling company further deteriorated the situation of the independent small handliners. While government was uncomfortable with the trawling companies' monopolistic practices, it saw the handline sector as a primitive holdover and therefore did not uphold the rights of handline fishers faced with encroachment by trawlers. The Still Bay fishery remained dependent on middlemen, limiting the profitability of the fishery. A tiny fish processing facility operated during WWII, but by and large the regional council sought to maintain the tourism-oriented image of the town. The development of both towns was strongly shaped by government policy and the development of the trawling sector. While the 20th century opened with handlining being the dominant mode of fishing, by the 1950s handline fishing was a marginal economic activity.

Keywords: Benguela, commercial handline fishing; Bottom trawling; Inter-sectoral conflict; Market access; Monopoly; Transportation; Kob (*Argyrosomus inodorus*); Sole (*Austroglossus pectoralis*); Small-scale fishing policy

Introduction: Modernity and tradition

The twentieth century saw a radical restructuring of the fishing industry worldwide on nearly all levels including fishing science, fishing technology, fish marketing and fisheries management. Johnsen et al. describe the modern small-scale North Atlantic fishery in the 2000s as follows:

Like other forms of industrial production, fishing operations have become networked and are now deeply embedded in the service programme and knowledge infrastructure provided by gear manufacturers, shipyards, and other professional and commodified systems. [...] While a great deal of the activities that used to constitute the work of the fishers has now been integrated into bureaucratic programs and technological systems, the focus of the fishing operators' responsibilities has shifted toward that of running a business, controlling finances and investments, and understanding fishing legislation (Johnsen et al., 2009:20).

This description suits South Africa's industrial fisheries, including the trawling sector. But the development trajectory that Johnsen and his co-authors describe to have led up to this state of affairs does not hold for South Africa. The local small-scale fisheries¹ did not go through an independent modernization process rather the sector was sidelined in favour of industrial fisheries from the first half of the twentieth century onwards. The government did not uphold local fishing communities' claims to exclusive access to adjacent marine resources; instead the industrial trawling sector's technological and organisational sophistication was upheld as an ideal. Despite plans by the national government in the 1930s and early 1940s to help the small-scale fishing concerns to attain modernity through state assistance, big fishing companies were allowed to extend monopoly control into the inshore sector after 1945 (Van Sittert, 2002a). Commercial handliners have been embedded in the South African fishing industry in a subordinate role.

Reflecting on the state of the handline fishing industry today compared to its state in the 1930s, Attwood (2013) comments:

In the ensuing 80 years the craft have continued to improve, and yet the basic elements of the handline fishing method have remained: manually operated lines, day-trips, no cold storage, no value added production, and, critically, no bargaining power on the part of the fishers. Without the ability to slowly release their product on the market, fishers are exposed to catch fluctuations and the vagaries of supply and demand (Attwood, 2013: 9–13).

The above highlights a particular characteristic of the commercial handline fishing industry in South Africa: despite being as enmeshed in the intricacies of current fisheries management as the industrial fishing sectors of South Africa and embracing modern technological aids, this sector has been peculiarly resistant to modernisation and has suffered for it.

In the decades before World War 2, the main critiques against the inshore fishing sector (today called the small-scale fisheries or SSF sector that includes handlining) was the sector's lack of access to "modern" managerial methods and its disorganized nature that prevented individual fishers from taking advantage of economies of scale like the industrial fisheries. The irredeemably small-scale nature of handline fishing resulted in line fishers seldom having access to the necessary capital to modernize by buying better boats and gear. The handline fishery was seen as backwards and the fishers who took part in it were seen as left behind by progress. According to government the handline fishery was a socio-economic problem both caused by and causing the inshore fishers'

perceived backwardness, illiteracy, improvidence and lack of sobriety. Discussions around state intervention in this sector prior to 1944 left no space for the small-scale individualistic handline fishing operations as they existed then and still exist today. Plans were tabled to organize handline fishers into co-operatives that would act as centralized marketing bodies for fishing communities (Union of South Africa, 1934; Stohr, 1977).

This paper explores how these debates played out on the south coast, specifically at Mossel Bay and Still Bay. It is part of a larger inter-disciplinary study of the Agulhas Bank involving research by oceanographers and social scientists. The socio-economic history of the fishing industry off the southern Cape coast is bound intricately to the ecological history of the Agulhas Bank. South Africa's first trawl grounds were on the Agulhas Bank and this industry's fate is dependent on and is an important indicator of the area's ecological health. While the scale and impact of the commercial handline and the industrial trawl industry in the region may seem vastly dissimilar, these fishing sectors interacted historically. The economic and political thinking raised by such interactions, specifically during the 1930s and 40s, is currently being reiterated by South Africa's post-1994 fisheries managers in their struggle to implement a workable SSF policy. In the 1930s and 40s government debated and ultimately decided against organizing fishing communities into co-operatives and left the problems facing small-scale fishers largely unaddressed. Today small-scale fishing communities struggle with the same problems regarding market access and competition from the industrial fishing sector and the solution debated is again to organize fishing communities into co-operatives. Recording how these early fisheries conflicts and debates surrounding establishing co-operatives played out is therefore important to current managers and researchers.

The chief mandate of the post 1994 is the socio-economic transformation of South Africa. In fisheries this broadly meant transferring fishing rights and fishing income from whites to previously disadvantaged individuals (PDI). The commercial fisheries were governed by a quota regime that in most sectors did not give PDI access rights (Isaacs, 2011). The handline fishery was, however, an open access fishery under the apartheid regime. A licencing system was introduced in 1985 to limit effort but compliance was low and it was resented by commercial fishers. Entry was therefore barred not through an official rights regime but by the increasing cost of purchasing, equipping and operating a suitable boat. This resulted in a fishery wherein most skippers and boat owners in the commercial handline fishery were white, middle-aged men while fishing crews were PDIs (mainly coloureds) working for low wages (Brouwer 1997).

The government's concern with this fishery after the promulgation of the new Marine Living Resources Act in 1998 (Act 18 of 1998) was initially to limit effort and not to transform it. A state of environmental emergency was declared for this fishery in 2000 and when medium term fishing rights were allocated in the handline sector in July 2003, only 346 rights were allocated (excluding exemptions and relief permits). Fishers with rights in other fisheries or for whom fishing was a secondary source of income were excluded. A maximum of 450 long term rights were made available to the fishery when long term rights were allocation for 1 January 2006 to 31 December 2013 (Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, 2005).

But plans to rebuild linefish stocks were overtaken by a parallel development in the fisheries management sphere. Fishers in impoverished coastal communities with high

expectations for reform were increasingly frustrated by its lack. Unable to secure fishing rights in oversubscribed fisheries, they protested that their customary fishing activities were criminalized (Sunde et al., 2013). Fisheries management was also slow to develop the co-management strategies required by both its declared commitment to an ecosystem approach to fisheries management and its need to incorporate coastal communities in fisheries governance in order to improve compliance. The result of these perceived management failures was a class action suit against the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. The Equality Court ruled in 2007 that the Minister must formulate a SSF policy and accommodate these fishers in the interim (Sowman, 2011). The result was a problematic system of interim relief permits for small-scale fishers (Masifundise Development Trust, 2015a) and a controversial SSF policy that was tabled in parliament in 2012 but lingered in legislative limbo for years: Government only started the public consultation process for specific SSF regulations in March of 2015 (Masifundise Development Trust, 2015b). This policy intends to provide small-scale fishers with a range of small quotas to inshore resources including handline fishing on communal basis (Praat Saam met Lynette Francis, 2014).

When fisheries management only issued 215 of the possible 450 handline fishing rights on 30 December 2013 with the intention to transfer the remainder of the rights to the SSF sector, participants in the handline sector was outraged. The Ministry countered with a populist appeal emphasizing the need for 'transformation' in the handline sector but unsuccessful applicants for handline rights were not appeased (Praat Saam met Lynette Francis, 2014). The 2013 fishing rights allocation process has since been set aside pending review and the handline sector is therefore operating in a state of uncertainty Moolla (2014).

In the light of this, the debate surrounding the proposed SSF policy has grown heated. Fisheries activists, concerned with the government's default espousal of neo-liberal economic policies instead of more actively pursuing its mandate to redress apartheid-era economic inequalities, claim that the Individual Transferable Quota (ITQ) system by which fishing rights have been allocated in South Africa is "incompatible with achieving social justice" (Isaacs, 2011: 63). Inspired by international precedents of SSF communities protecting their rights from encroachment by industrial fisheries, they envision small scale fishing rights and resources co-managed by fishing communities (Sowman, 2011; Sunde et al., 2013). Critics, with the disastrous early 1990s community trust quota system and the stillborn attempt in 2000 to establish community fishing forums as examples, argue that coastal communities are too fractured to organize themselves into bodies that can represent the interests of bona fide fishers and that they lack the capacity to manage co-operatives (Van Sittert, 2002b).

Sowman argues that small-scale fisheries are increasingly seen as complex socio-ecological systems with a range of "inter-related, interacting ecological, biophysical, economic, social and cultural components" (Sowman, 2011: 299). She continues:

Of particular relevance to understanding small-scale fishery systems is their history and social, economic and political context. These systems are constantly evolving and their past is largely responsible for their present behaviour (Sowman, 2011: 299).

This paper therefore sets out to provide some historical background for a particular sector of the SSF sector, the handline sector, in a particular locale, the south Coast.

The Still Bay and Mossel Bay handline fisheries had different beginnings: Still Bay was rural and the fishery started as a subsistence activity focussed on the Goukou² River estuary. The fishery at Mossel Bay, in contrast, was part of a broader network of commercial activities centred on Mossel Bay harbour. At Still Bay the closure of the Goukou River to commercial fishing pushed the fishers out to sea while the increased scarcity of land made them increasingly dependent on fishing as their sole source of income. The fishing technologies employed by these two fisheries therefore developed congruently. In addition, both fisheries were marginalized and struggled to access markets. But the nature of this marginalization was different. The Still Bay fishers were marginalized due to geographic isolation: It is just over 41 km from Riversdale, the closest town with a railway station. While Mossel Bay had a railway station and a larger population, this larger market together with the harbour facilities, attracted commercial trawlers. The Mossel Bay handline fishery developed in uneasy co-existence with the local trawling industry.

A dearth of sources

Unfortunately, a historian researching the history of the linefishing industry in South Africa, especially on the south coast, is immediately frustrated by the lack of sources dealing with the topic in depth. The available secondary source on the history of South Africa's fishing industry focus on the west coast and the industrial fisheries. This is understandable—the west coast and industrial fisheries account for the majority of the catch – but this leaves those interested in the biologically less productive south coast somewhat at a loss. Primary written sources are equally scarce. The Department of Sea Fisheries has not regularly deposited their correspondence and other documents to the National Archives. This may have been a consequence of the department's frequent migration between ministries, but whatever the cause, it presents historians with a serious dearth of publically available information. The commercial handline industry also does not publish its own trade journal.

There are multiple reasons for this dearth of resources: the trawling sector overtook the linefish sector in catch volume by 1916 and has since dwarfed it economically (Lees, 1969). This economic reality also dictated research efforts. In his foreword to the proceedings at the fourth linefish symposium Atwood commented "From the earliest 1900's, the handline fishery was cast in the primitive role, with the real resources being directed at more lucrative operations and industrial-scale activities" (Attwood, 2013: 10).

Van Sittert comments that colonial governments like that of the Cape of Good Hope and, after 1910, the Union of South Africa, supported scientific research only to the extent to which it promoted economic development (Van Sittert, 1995). The main objective of the appointment of the Cape Colony's first marine biologist, John D. F. Gilchrist, was therefore to find lucrative trawling grounds for the nascent colonial trawling industry. Gilchrist and his staff on the *Pieter Faure* (a steam-trawler acquired by the Cape government from Scotland) found the Agulhas bank grounds in 1898, launching the South African trawling industry. But the marine survey was discontinued after 1904 for financial reasons. It was only revived in 1920, reflecting the minor role of the fishing industry in the Union economy (Van Sittert, 1995).

But Gilchrist was not only hired to promote trawling, he was active in formulating fisheries policy. Effective fisheries management requires a full understanding of the marine environment and the socio-economic realities of the fisheries being legislated for. Commenting in 1914 on the various fishing conflicts he and the Cape Provincial Fisheries Advisory Board had to mediate, Gilchrist expressed his frustration at his lack of hard scientific evidence to base a decision on. He was beset by contradictory testimonies from fishing communities: "...frequently the Government of the country when appealed to, [was] put in the position of merely weighing the unfounded statements of one interested party against those of another, for lack of information" (Gilchrist, 1914:7). But Gilchrist was himself an 'interested party' on the side of the trawling industry. When the provincial administration discussed excluding trawlers within three nautical miles of the province's shores during the last months of 1917 and the first half of 1918 (at that stage the full extent of the Cape's territorial water) Gilchrist sided with the trawling companies (CA, PAN 73a).

An additional factor in this relative government neglect is the unorganized nature of the SSF sector. States, it is theorized, prefer interventions into large scale, legible systems. Science is crucial in these interventions: "Fisheries management requires the application of science to translate fish, fisher folks and communities into abstract objects that can be handled by the management system" (Johnsen et al., 2009: 10). Fisheries are therefore legible to managers to the extent to which the scientific translation is successful but not all real world systems and objects are equally 'translatable' by science (Johnsen et al., 2009).

The industrial fisheries of South Africa seemingly offered the ideal terrain for state control. From its onset these fisheries consisted of a limited number of participants targeting a limiting number of fish species. The industry quickly organized in corporations with clear management structures and vertically integrated processing and marketing departments. This clarity proves illusionary upon deeper study-today the industrial fisheries form a web of interrelated companies with complex patterns of ownership (Cooper et al., 2014; Ponte and Van Sittert, 2006; Hersoug and Isaacs, 2001). However, the large number of handline fishers operating in an industry without strong organisation and targeting a greater diversity of fish species was and is more difficult to translate and therefore to manage. The lack of data also meant that government did not consider it necessary to manage the fishery while the lack of detailed economic data regarding capital investment and the GDP contribution of the industry made it hard for researchers to justify government expenditure on the sector (Brunt, 1993).

Both the handline and inshore trawl sector also lack early serial statistics. The Cape Provincial Administration passed legislation in 1920 that called for detailed statistical returns from various actors in the fishing industry (Cape Province, 1920: Ordinance 30). This resulted in the collection of monthly fishing statistics for major fishing companies and weekly catch records for handliners. While fishing companies were expected to provide their catch data directly to government, handline catch records were gathered by various petty bureaucrats and police officers who visited local landing places daily for a small stipend. In the manner, valuable statistics were gathered to 1931 (CA, PAN 53a).

As the Union government absorbed more of the functions of the provincial administration by the establishment of the Division of Fisheries (later called the Division of Sea

Fisheries) within the Department of Mines and Industries in 1929 (Lees, 1969), the Cape Provincial Administration decided to disengage from fisheries management. It was especially eager to escape responsibility for gathering fisheries statistics since it increasingly saw the data collected as useless: They did not have the funds to fill positions when collectors quit or retired. As a result they were only receiving returns from 29 fishing stations in 1931 as opposed to the 122 returns they received in 1921 when data gathering started. Von Bonde, the director of the Division of Fisheries, could not manage to secure funding from the Department of Mines and Industries to take over the data gathering network and it was therefore discontinued at the end of 1931 (CA, PAN 53a). Fishing companies still provided government with statistical returns but the gathering of handline fishing statistics stopped (CA, PAN 53b).

Von Bonde tried twice more to secure funding for a proper catch per unit of effort statistical system. The Board of Trade and Industries launched an investigation regarding the state of the South African Fishing industry in 1932 and their findings were published late in 1934. This, together with a parliamentary reshuffle in 1933 which saw the Division of Fisheries placed within the newly created Department of Commerce and Industries, provided Von Bonde, still the only permanent employee of the division, with hope that he would acquire more funding (Lees, 1969). But again very little was done in regards to fishing statistics (SA, HEN 1501a; SA, HEN 1501b). An ambitious 1938 proposal for a catch per unit of effort data gathering system based on a similar system implemented by the state of California was also rejected. He could not interest the Statistics Council in the scheme (SA, HEN 1501c) and the secretary of Commerce and Industries did not believe the Union's fishing industry was sufficiently developed for such a data gathering scheme to be necessary or successful. With fishing industry representatives appealing for government intervention in the fishing industry because of its 'backwardness', Von Bonde's 1938 suggestion that the industry was ripe for measures implemented in an industrial fishery like that of California was not persuasive (SA, HEN 1501d). Commercial handline catch statistics were only again gathered in a systematic manner with the inception of the National Marine Linefish System (NMLS) in 1985.

Von Bonde therefore had to content himself with the catch data voluntarily returned by fishing companies. But the historic trawl statistics is extremely problematic. Not only is there no way of ascertaining the accuracy of such returns, but company returns did not include catches by small, independent operators. For Mossel Bay the latter was especially problematic since the nucleus of the inshore trawling sector formed at this port. I&J started to focus on deep-sea fishing off the Agulhas Bank and bought inshore trawled fish, including sole, from smaller independent trawlers. But apparently the Division of Sea Fisheries only realized that non-I&J trawlers were operating from Mossel Bay in 1964. Von Bonde's successor as director of the Division of Sea Fisheries, J.D. Theart, assumed that these vessels' catch returns would be included in I&J's returns since it was the main fish buyer in the area, but I&J's management disabused Theart of that notion (CA, SF 383a). Independent trawler owners were thereafter told to keep log books and submit them monthly (CA, SF 383b). Independent inshore trawlers, however, were only intermittently compliant until the late 1970s (Payne, 1986).

Fishing boat registers are an equally inadequate source of information. While the Cape Provincial Administration instituted a boat licencing system in 1911, a central register has not always been maintained. Boat licenses were also not issued by a central

authority (CA, PAN 72). The *South African Fishing Industries Handbook (SAFIH)* published a boat register from 1951 onwards but this register is problematic: As an example, the part-time Still Bay harbour superintendent complained in 1959 and 1960 that the harbour was being congested by the great number of boats that were registered there (CA, SF 340a; CA, SF 340b). However, the *SAFIH* does not list any boats registered at Still Bay during this period. This oversight can perhaps be explained by the fact that the Still Bay fishing harbour was administered through the Riversdale Divisional Council (RDC) and that the harbour superintendent largely worked without oversight from either the RDC or the Division of Fisheries. In addition to being incomplete, a major obstacle to the use of the boat register in a regional study is the fact that boats were not required to operate solely were they were registered (CA, SF 340b).

As discussed below, the handline fisheries of Still Bay and Mossel Bay changed radically since the beginning of the twentieth century. Fishing effort increased, necessitating the adoption of boats with a longer range. As consequence, owner-built dinghies disappeared in favour of keeled motorboats and then ski-boats. Fishing effort at Still Bay moved from the Goukou estuary to the open ocean. These changes occurred due to pressures from the broader economical and biological environments in which the development of the industrial trawling sector played a key role. However there are no hard economic data or catch records to describe these changes quantitatively. What follows is therefore a narrative account of developments on the south coast during the first half of the twentieth century constructed from sporadic government reports and the available correspondence files of the Department of Commerce and Industries and the Fisheries Division.

Fishing on the south coast

The fishing industry in Mossel Bay and Still Bay (Fig. 1) had very different development trajectories in the early days of the industrialized fishery and the period before it. The modern town of Mossel Bay was founded by merchants who wanted to develop the port to ship grain and wool from the surrounding farms and timber from the Outeniqua forests to Cape Town. The early harbour was a primitive affair consisting of little more than a seawall and a jetty while services were provided by the local merchants. Descriptions of the development of the fishing industry of the west coast suggest that merchants involved in the coastal grain trade were also involved in the fishing industry there. Merchants often owned the fishing boats and acted as intermediaries in fish sales (Van Sittert, 1992). This pattern also held for Mosel Bay (CA, LC 218).

Starting in 1898, the Mossel Bay harbour was rebuilt in preparation for the extension of the railway from Mossel Bay to George and then Oudtshoorn. It was anticipated that commercial traffic would increase at the harbour after the railway construction was completed but better harbour facilities were also needed to off load rolling stock and other railway equipment. The existing harbour wall was extended and a quay was built (CA, PWD 2/5/276). The new harbour development attracted a trawler fishing company to Mossel Bay. The South African Fisheries and Cold Storage Company Ltd. was incorporated on 4 September 1900. The company took over the assets of a local company, Mossel Bay Fisheries, and of a Cape Town based outfit, Atlantic Fisheries. SAFSC's first steam trawler, the *Undine*, was acquired from the liquidated company



called South African Fisheries Limited (CA, LC 229). As suggested from the number of defunct companies listed above, the early trawling industry was highly competitive and companies struggled to survive (Lees, 1969). However, the SAFCS was relatively successful. The company was ideally situated to exploit the rich south coast sole fishery and after the Oudtshoorn branch of the railways was completed, it had access to potentially lucrative inland markets. I&J eventually bought the company in 1929 (Board of Trade and Industries, 1934), but SAFCS continued to trade under its own name as late as 1956³ (SAFIH, 1955–56). From the start of the 20th century the handline fishery therefore had to co-exist with the industrial trawling sector. The SAFCS would come to function as both a reluctant ally in the Mossel Bay linefishing community’s quest for better harbour facilities and as a bitter rival for inshore fish.

The first detailed description of both the Mossel Bay and Still Bay fisheries comes from the pen of the fishing officer, A. C. Cripps, in 1913. At that stage coloured fishers predominated in the handline fishery at Mossel Bay and owed most of the rowboats used. But Cripps described them as being at the mercy of local fish hawkers. Because there were no government regulations to govern fish sales, the fishers were “done down at every turn” (Cape Province, 1914). Both white and coloured fishers earned about £8 per month from fishing, but the coloured fishers had more dependants than the white fishers: the 30 white

fishermen at Mossel Bay had 77 dependants while the 46 coloured fishers had an estimated 150. Both white and coloured fishers were not employed in the industry fulltime but also did odd jobs or worked as lightermen in the harbour (Cape Province, 1914).

In contrast, the fishers at Still Bay still had close ties to the local agricultural economy. The town that is called Still Bay today was only established in the third decade of the twentieth century when the outspan⁴ servitude on portions of the Still Bay Goukou River Outspan and Forrest Reserve were lifted in 1926 and the land was subdivided and auctioned off (Department of Mines and Industries, 1927). However, the fishing industry of the area predates the establishment of the town by centuries. The first European settlers in the region took over the use and maintenance of the stone fish traps constructed by Khoisan communities some 3000 years ago. These tidal fish traps can be found sporadically along the coast in a 115 km stretch from Blombos, 30 km west of Still Bay, to near Mossel Bay. Maintaining the traps and harvesting them at spring tides necessitated the formation and maintenance of social networks through which labour could be organised and fishing rights distributed. Duggan (2012) theorises that these networks served as the model for the organisation of loose collectives in the Still Bay commercial handline fishery.

Due to the scenic location of the outspan, farmers of the Riversdale area used to camp there during the summer with their families and they would take the opportunity to fish off the beach. It is not known when this started, but the custom was well established by the 1860s. The coloured community of Melkhoutfontein was founded by the Anglican Church in 1872 on land bought from the farm *Melkhoute Fontein*. The community fished in the river with handlines and nets since the establishment of the settlement. At some stage local farmers started to supply flat-bottomed fishing boats to fishing crews from Melkhoutfontein who had to give the boat owner part of their catch in payment. This fish was then given to coloured farm workers as rations (Steyn, 1996; Louw, 2006).

It appears that this commercial fishery started in earnest when the land in the area became so subdivided that many of the Melkhoutfontein residents and some of the white families no longer had access to sufficient land to pursue a living primarily through agriculture. The white fishers were described as “poor Dutch” by Cripps in 1913, although most of them still had market gardens to supplement their fishing income with. These men earned up to £3 per month during the peak fishing season. Unfortunately, the material condition of their coloured fishing crews went unreported. The fish was marketed at Riversdale by fish hawkers who travelled to and from Still Bay with carts. Since demand was low at Riversdale, hawkers needed to corner the market by getting there early so fishers competed to return to shore first in order to secure good prices for their fish (Cape Province, 1914). Mossel Bay’s railway line and higher population therefore supplied better market conditions to fishers than Still Bay’s rural isolation did, but in both communities handline fishers had low incomes.

In addition to different marketing conditions, fishing conditions were very different between the two communities. The early Still Bay fishery was dependent on the river. In 1913 the fishery consisted of seven boats of which six ventured out to sea regularly. The fishing community consisted of 15 white men with 78 dependants and 29 coloured men with 193 dependants. A cement landing stage was built to the west of the river mouth but it was exposed to the weather and therefore seldom used. The fishers usually docked at jetties upstream and had to cross the sand bank and heavy surf at the river mouth to access the ocean (Cape Province, 1914).

This dependency on the river declined as fishers lost access to riverside plots and, like other South African rivers, the Goukou River was gradually closed to subsistence and commercial fishing in favour of recreational angling in the first decades of the twentieth century: A closed season was introduced in 1911 (Cape Province, 1911: Proclamation 223) and in 1936 fishers were restricted to using fly fishing gear (Cape Province, 1936: Proclamation 1). In the mid-1920s eight of the 17 boats active at Still Bay netted for harders (South African southern mullet or *Liza richardsonii*) in the Goukou estuary and did not go out to sea. But this fishery was closed on request from the RDC in 1943 (Union of South Africa, 1943: Government notice 2266). This closure was amended to allow netting from the river mouth to the Grootfontein pont in 1946 (Union of South Africa, 1946: Government notice 1585) but the pont was located three miles (4.83 km) from the river mouth while tidal water was believed to push up the Goukou for 10–11 miles (16.1 km–17.7 km). A long stretch of river was therefore closed to netters with this legislation and smallholders with property on the riverbank who used to net with set nets were now denied this source of income. Despite local protest, the RDC was adamant that this closure should be maintained, arguing that netters caught immature fish, that their activities meant that less fish ascended the river from the estuary and that the netting interfered with recreational anglers and other holiday makers (SA, HEN 1524).

While the Still Bay fishers who ventured out of the river had to perform impressive feats of seamanship to navigate the heavy surf at the river mouth, Mossel Bay handline fishers had the convenience of a sheltered beach within the harbour to land their boats. In 1913 there were 17 privately owned rowboats using the harbour. Although the SAFCSC operated six motorboats for linefishing and were therefore in direct competition with the local handline fishery, the presence of the company was also partly beneficial to the Mossel Bay handline fishers. The company's ice plant allowed fishers to buy ice to pack their fish for rail transport and so they could reach bigger markets. The SAFCSC also maintained a covered fish cleaning station that was open to all fishers who used the harbour (SA, TES 650).

Cripps viewed these developments as positive signs of progress. He was especially impressed with the SAFCSC's modern fish-canning factory with its own tin making plant. But this efficiency stood in shrill contrast to the decidedly unmodern harbour infrastructure. The harbour at this stage did not have a breakwater and the area near the jetty had silted up so that the motorboats and trawlers had to be moored in the open sea. Fish and other goods were transhipped to dinghies and then hauled up to the jetty with a pulley system powered by donkeys. These conditions provided necessary secondary employment for much of Mossel Bay's handline fishers but Cripps saw it as wasting both time and labour (Cape Province, 1914).

While Cripps noticed the general inefficiency of Mossel Bay harbour, he did not comment on the growing friction between the independent handline fishers and the SAFCSC. Trawler operators had a tacit agreement amongst themselves and with other fishing industries not to trawl within three nautical miles from the shore. Although this was not a law, it was the standard practice in Europe at the time and South African trawling companies apparently generally abided by this custom (CA, PAN 73b; CA, PAN 73c). In 1917, the Mossel Bay handline fishers attempted to make the three-mile exclusion zone legally enforceable. Fishers first raised the matter with the Mossel Bay

harbour master who got an informal agreement from the trawlers that they would respect a three-mile linefishing ground from Cape St. Blaize at Mossel Bay to the mouth of the Little Brak River (CA, PAN 73d). But the handline fishers were also angry that the trawlers were catching and discarding undersized fish and so denuding their fishing grounds. They complained that catches has been of poor since 1915 (CA, PAN 73e). The fishers approached the local MP, A. I. Vincent, to intercede on their behalf and the matter resulted in an investigation by the Cape Provincial Administration (CA, PAN 73f). The fishers at this stage were organized by the local chapter of the Coloured Vigilance Society. They could appeal to the MP because they were voters, but were careful to stress that white handline fishers were also negatively affected by trawling (CA, PAN 73 g).

The matter was investigated by the Fisheries Survey which asked the commercial fishing companies for their opinion. I&J argued that the recent fish scarcity along the south coast could be explained by the above average rainfall the region experienced since fish populations fluctuated with ocean salinity (CA, PAN 73 h). The SAFCSC was equally dismissive of the fishers' concerns. They claimed that fish was scarce only for the last six months (late 1917 to May 1918) due to fish moving away from shore to spawn. According to the company's chairman, trawling was akin to ploughing: it stirred up crustaceans and vegetable matter upon which smaller fish feed and so supported the population of prey species. According to the logic of this scientifically dubious explanation, trawling indirectly caused population increases in the larger ichthyovores that were the main targets of the trawling industry (CA, PAN 73i). While other trawling companies acknowledged that a bycatch of immature fish was unavoidable (CA, PAN 73j; CA, PAN 73 k), SACSC claimed that the wings of trawl nets provide many opportunities for immature fish to escape. The few that did remain in their nets were processed together with fish offal, sharks and skates into fishmeal. They claimed that their linefishing boats did not experience smaller catches and insisted that there were plentiful fish for all (CA, PAN 73i).

Without fishing statistics, the handline fishers' complaints could not be substantiated and therefore the matter was not pursued by the government any further. However, the Mossel Bay handline fishers raised it again in 1921. Now the fishers' cause was championed by the local fishing statistics collector, Major Arthur C. Miller (retired). Again fishers using rowboats complained that fish was scarce at Mossel Bay, but the local Resident Magistrate reported that their complaints were mistaken: the trawling company and its motorboats had good catches so they had no reason to complain (CA, PAN 73 l). The fishers also complained that the recent change in the Mossel Bay train service from a daily to a tri-weekly service adversely affected their market access. This was also dismissed by the Resident Magistrate who argued that since the fishers were dependent on middlemen for market access it was not the fishers' profits that were damaged but that of the fish sellers. Also, the SAFCSC bought excess linefish at prices comparable to prices paid by local middlemen (CA, PAN 73 l; CA, PAN 73 m).

The Provincial Administration therefore believed that the fishers' complaints could be dismissed, but the Resident Magistrate misrepresented the state of the Mossel Bay handline fishery. The eight to ten independent rowboats that were still operating had a much shorter range than SAFCSC's motorboats and trawlers and fish was depleted in these fishers' traditional range. According to Miller, some of these handline fishers were also trying to develop an independent market for their catch and the daily rail service

greatly aided these efforts. But they did not have access to cold storage facilities and they could therefore not store fish for tri-weekly transportation and were now forced into selling to middlemen and the SAFCSC as before (CA, PAN 73n).

In 1924 Miller again wrote to the Provincial Secretary on behalf of the Mossel Bay handline fishers with similar results. This time the fishers also complained about the poor state of the fish washing facilities at the harbour and their lack of access to cold storage facilities. The Resident Magistrate was presented with signed affidavits from fishers testifying that trawlers ran at them while they were fishing and that trawlers fished within two miles from the shore (CA, PAN 74a). The Resident Magistrate again argued that trawlers could not be blamed for fish scarcity at Mossel Bay but that the local handline fishers simply lacked the necessary fishing gear to exploit the fishing grounds effectively. Although the magistrate did not doubt that the fishers were under financial strain, he saw this as a consequence of their lack of market access. There was simply not a sufficient local demand for linefish, leading to low prices (CA, PAN 74b). The fishers' race counted against them. The rowboat owners and crew that complained were all coloured, a fact that likely influenced the Cape Province Fisheries Advisory Council to dismiss them and their wooden dinghies as a primitive holdover (CA, PAN 74c).

The 1926–7 Harbour Commission's report on Mossel Bay further illuminated the situation at Mossel Bay. The coloured fishers felt that they could not speak freely at the Harbour Committee's public hearing since this meeting would be attended by representatives of SAFCSC. Coloured boat owners would at this stage also no longer have been able to work as lightermen in the harbour. The railway line did not prove a boon to the Mossel Bay harbour: As the railway line network expanded it diverted freight away from the harbour and the inadequate breakwater made Mossel Bay unattractive to commercial shipping (SA, MES 75a). In addition the civilized labour policy adopted by the government in 1924 was prejudicial towards blacks. Under this policy, government departments were encouraged to accept tenders from white owned businesses and give preference to white job seekers. South African Railways and Harbour (SAR&H), which administered Mossel Bay harbour, took this policy to extremes: It also accused of supporting a bloated work force as part of a social welfare agenda to ameliorate unemployment amongst whites (South African Parliament, 5 May 1930). Independent coloured contractors would therefore no longer find employment at Mossel Bay harbour. They were replaced by the introduction of SAR&H-owned and operated motorized tugboats (SA, MES 75b).

Mr John Matthews, who owned four fishing boats, organized the coloured fishers. He complained that the reduced rail service ruined his nascent fish distribution business. The tri-weekly train also left at 1:30 in the morning (while the daily train used to depart at 19:30), giving time for the fish to spoil. The SAFCSC was also exploiting the handline fishers' reduced marketing opportunities. Arguing that the independent handline fishers' catch was in excess to demand, they bought fish at 3 pence (d) per fish. But boat owners paid fishing crew 6d per fish landed, meaning that boat owners forced to sell to the SAFCSC suffered a significant loss. To add insult to injury, trawling persisted to encroach on linefishing grounds and fishers often observed them as close as one mile from shore (CA, FDS 8a). But Wadner, the chairman of SAFCSC, defended his company's actions. He claimed there was no significant demand for fish since the population centres they supplied were already well catered for. According to him, spending

government money on facilities for the local linefishing industry would therefore be pointless (CA, FDS 8b).

The committee reported that Mossel Bay had 5838 residents of which 800 were dependent on the fishing industry. The fishing industry was therefore an important source of employment but the insufficiencies at the harbour was seen as hampering its development. SAFSC's trawlers and boats were moored at sea and the risk inherent in this discouraged them from increasing their fleet at Mossel Bay. Without safe mooring for motorboats, local entrepreneurs did not want to risk investing in motorboats either. But the traditional handline sector also had complaints about the harbour: Although a limited number of their boats could be beached in the harbour, the beach was submerged during high tides. Getting to this beach also required them to cross a series of railway sidings and the harbour seawall (Union of South Africa, 1927).

The government was apparently also unable to administer its harbour improvement budget since it failed to spend money set aside for harbour repairs at Mossel Bay. A 1914 plan to build a breakwater of 1000 ft was also never executed as only 250 ft was completed before World War I interrupted construction. The harbour had also silted up so motorboats and trawlers could not reach the quay (CA, FDS 8b). Without mooring lines and a proper breakwater, motorboats had to ride out storms at sea to prevent them being dashed to pieces on the sea wall during heavy weather. The harbour master also did not maintain the fresh water pumps and facilities necessary for cleaning fish (Union of South Africa, 1927).

The handline fishers and local anglers also requested that the government should build a dedicated small boat harbour at Munro's Bay (alternatively spelled Monroe Bay), a cove east of the harbour. However, with most of Mossel Bay's foreshore being Crown land reserved for the railways, Munro's Bay would not solve the fishers' access problems (CA, FDS 8b).

Although both the trawling and linefishing industries were unified in their desire for better harbour facilities, the two industries did not have the same interests. The handline fishers wanted government to help them built a cold storage and fish packing facility at the harbour but this did not find favour with the committee since they felt that the government did not have a mandate to intervene in the free market economy beyond the provision of public infrastructure. Fishing companies constructed their own facilities on land they held on long-term leases (Union of South Africa, 1927). The request for cold storage facilities was supported by the mayor of Mossel Bay, S.N. Kanterowitz. In an interview with the local paper, the *Mossel Bay Advertiser*, he stated that many people have tried to establish fishing companies at Mossel Bay in past 20 years but they all failed due to lack of sufficient ice and cold storage facilities. This proposal was supported by the farmers in the area who wanted cold storage for fresh produce and state funded cold storage facilities for Western Cape fruit farmers to facilitate the fruit export industry was presented as precedent (CA, FDS 8c).

The Still Bay fishery was also experiencing problems by the 1920s. The Fishing Harbour Committee found a considerably expanded fishery from the fishery described by Cripps in 1913. Now there were 17 boats of which eight stayed in the river and netted for harders. The number of white fishers had sharply increased, now there were 60 white men and only 35 coloured men involved. These fishers were estimated to have had 200 dependants. But life was harder for them than in 1913, or perhaps the

inspectors were just more aware of poverty: Most of the fishers were now landless and only a handful had sufficient land to maintain a kitchen garden for own use (Union of South Africa, 1927). A local Riversdale paper, *The South Western Echo*, reporting on the committee's meeting with the local fishers on 4 September 1926, presented a different picture of the Still Bay fishery. According to the paper, the nine sea going Still Bay skippers were employing 90 to 100 men with 500–600 dependants. The fishers also complained about encroachment from the Mossel Bay trawling industry since they claimed trawlers often came to within three miles of the Goukou River mouth (CA, FDS 8 days). This complaint was not mentioned in the Harbour Committee's report or in the unpublished minutes it generated.

At this stage Still Bay was developing into a holiday destination (Union of South Africa, 1927). There was high demand for fish from holidaymakers during the summer and this apparently sustained the fishing community through the leaner months. The Still Bay fishery therefore increasingly drew poor whites from the surrounding rural areas. Although fish was in plentiful supply, the lack of a proper mooring place and heavy seas in the area limited the industry (CA, FDS 8e). Entering the ocean from the river was an obstacle course: currents, sand banks and submerged rocks forced the boats to skirt the beach westwards from the river mouth to near Morris Point where they finally had some shelter to head out to sea. If the surf was too heavy, they could not cross the sand bank at the river mouth and then used the slipway close to Morris Point (Union of South Africa, 1927). This rudimentary slipway was not deep or wide enough for keeled motorboats (then seen as the future of the handline fishery) and was backed by a dune, leaving no space to beach boats. The fishers demanded a breakwater and a proper harbour so that they could use deck boats. But the committee was hesitant to endorse this, arguing that the heavy seas would soon silt up any harbour in the area (CA, FDS 8e). Such a development was also not financially feasible. They did recommend, however, that the existing slipway should be expanded by blasting away some rocks and that a boating platform should be constructed behind it in the dunes (Union of South Africa, 1927).

In the 1930s, the tone of government reports regarding the fishing industry changed. The Great Depression added to the ranks of the poor in South Africa and the 1932 Carnegie Commission gave government officials an analytical framework through which to approach the scourge of poor whitism (Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa, 1932).⁵ The 1934 Board of Trade and Industry's report on the fishing industry therefore saw participants in the inshore fishing industry (which mostly comprised handliners, rock lobster fishers and beach and estuary trek and seine netters) as being caught in a poverty trap. At the same time, the political climate of the 1930s made ambitious government intervention in the economy feasible. The board's public sittings therefore led to detailed discussions of the market conditions that prevailed in the fishing industry.

In the intervening years, the fishery at Still Bay had hardly changed: due to the Great Depression the proposed new slipway and landing place at Still Bay were not constructed. Fishers therefore still had to cross the sandbank to reach the ocean and were limited to their small, flat-bottomed boats that were dangerously unsuited to open sea fishing (Union of South Africa, 1934). While only seven boats were in operation, 400–500 coloured people were completely dependent on fishing for their income. Only a handful of them

had access to garden plots and only one had a milk cow. The white men involved in the fishing industry were mostly not completely dependent on fishing but still had low incomes. The skippers' income ranged from £50 to £100 per year; crew were paid with a portion of the catch (Union of South Africa, 1934). Still Bay had a reputation as a rich kob (mainly silver kob or *Argyrosomus inodorus*) ground and handline fishers complained that the trawlers trawled for kob very close to the existing slipway (SA, MES 75a).

The report described the Still Bay handliners as totally at the mercy of their buyers. The buyers wanted specific species of fish at set quantities and to meet demand fishers ventured up to 18 miles (28.97 km) out to sea. The fish buyers or "lorry men" bought fish at a set amount per "tel" or bunch, but the fishers and the lorry men could seldom agree on how many fish constituted a tel and without other buyers, the fishers eventually had to accept the lorry men's low offers (Union of South Africa, 1934). The lorry men refused to buy fish from fishers who sold fish to other buyers. This prevented fishers from selling fish directly to holiday makers. Since the lorry men were the main buyers, Still Bay fishers were at their mercy and they believed they would earn much more for their catch if they could market their own fish. Again fishers requested a bigger slipway and boat platform which would enable them to use motorboats. According to a witness, the fishers would be inspired by this slipway to organize themselves into small companies to purchasing better boats. These small companies would also market the catch directly and so cut out the lorry men and other intermediaries (SA, MES 75a).

Both local fishers and government officials believed there existed rich fish resources in the region that were left underutilized by the underdeveloped nature of the stagnant local fishing industry. But the board saw the fishers' main problem as their lack of organization: As long as they were unorganized, the local fishing community were unable to gain a better bargaining position and they could be taken advantage off. For example, a retired school teacher set himself up as intermediary between the fishers and the buyers at Still Bay and earned £12 per month for his services, considerably more than what was earned by the average fisher in the area. This middleman would not have been necessary and the fishers would then supposedly have had a better bargaining position if they marketed their fish as a cooperative (Union of South Africa, 1934).

This lack of organization was given a sociological explanation. Due to the inshore fishers' lack of education and supposed inherent conservatism, they were seen as irrationally attached to their own independence and resultantly reluctant to enter into co-operatives. But the report also suggested that they would find running a co-operative difficult even if they could be convinced to form one. Because the fishers were mostly not formally educated, they lacked the necessary managerial skill to manage a co-operative themselves and they lacked the necessary capital to hire managers. The board did not perceive the fishers' poverty as solely due to their lack of organization; it was inherent to their position as handline fishers. Since they caught fish in small quantities as the weather permitted, they simply could not deliver the steady supply of fish demanded by larger buyers. Unable to expand their market, they were unable to earn a higher income and so could not raise sufficient capital to invest in cold storage facilities and the larger boats necessary to deliver a steady supply of fish (Union of South Africa, 1934).

Although it was not mentioned at the time, an additional limiting factor was the small population of the Riversdale district, Still Bay's hinterland. At the time of the

1931 census,⁶ the region had a meagre white population of 9087 of which only 2543 were urbanized (Union of South Africa, 1933). Without access to cold storage facilities they could not access markets further afield. There was therefore little point in catching more than the lorry men could buy since a glut in fish would just reduce fishers' income. But even if they could gain access to a larger market, it was not certain whether the Still Bay fishers would have been able to meet large, regular fish orders. As discussed above, there were no harbour facilities to moor larger ships even if fishers could afford vessels which were more modern. A simple slipway and boating platform as proposed by the Harbour Commission in 1926 would not have solved this problem and small boats would therefore remain the norm in this fishery (Union of South Africa, 1934).

The handline fishers at Mossel Bay were in a similar position, but the presence of the SAFCSC, now an I&J affiliate, influenced their testimonies in a populist direction. The handline fishers complained of I&J's unfair practices and were sure that the adverse marketing conditions they experienced were due to the monopoly of the company. The position of the independent handline fishers at Mossel Bay had declined during the Great Depression: Only one rowboat was registered as a fishing vessel at Mossel Bay at that time, an indication that handline fishers either could not afford to register their boats or that the old wooden dinghies they used did not meet seaworthiness requirements. An unspecified number of unregistered dinghies were operated by coloured fishermen in contract to local businessmen (Union of South Africa, 1934).

Two coloured handline fishers, David Hunter and Esau (first name not given) testified before the Board in a separate sitting, using the opportunity to complain about their conditions of employments and the discrimination they faced at the hands of the SAFCSC. Esau was employed on a SAFCSC motorboat and Hunter crewed for a rowboat operated by a local store keeper. Both men worked under roughly similar conditions – a skipper operated the boat and paid the crew and the boat owner from fish sales. While Hunter had few complaints, Esau felt exploited. He complained that the SAFCSC expected its crew to provide their own tackle, clothing and provisions (SA, MES 75b). This was standard practice in the fishing industry at the time, however, especially for casual employees like a boating crew (Van Sittert, 1994: 28). It was the company's strict quota system that was Esau's main complaint: Weekly set quotas for most fish species meant that boats were lucky to go out once a week and that catch extra to quota requirements had to be discarded. The crew of SAFCSC motorboats also had to obtain their own bait, but could purchase this from the trawler discards. Esau complained, however, that the white trawler men sold bait to coloured boat crew at double the price they sold it for to whites (SA, MES 75b).

The SAFCSC's buying policy also penalized successful fishers. Normally fishers could sell their biggest 50 fish weighing 6 lb and upwards at 6d each and then the rest at 3d total. However, as soon as the remainder of the fishers' catch exceeded 50lbs, the company would only buy the biggest 25 fish at 6d each and the rest, up to 75 lb, at 3d in total. This was essentially high grading: The company got bigger, more valuable linefish at a discount and discarded smaller, less valuable fish as unmarketable. The '50-fish-and-50-lb-of-fish' basis of payment (or the 50/50 system) cost fishers 12 s 6d per catch landed that exceeded the quota. Esau also believed that white boat crew did not have to suffer under the 50/50 system. The company only allowed fishers to take one fish home

per fishing trip. Esau testified that "...I find than one fish is not sufficient for my family and as I have caught the fish myself I reckon I am entitled to another" (SA, MES 75b). This company policy therefore caused added resentment and forced fishers into dishonesty. Esau considered himself lucky if he earned £20 during the nine month fishing season – he had to occupy himself with various odd jobs around town and his wife had to take in laundry for them to make ends meet (SA, MES 75b).

Hunter skippered for Mr Trim, a local storekeeper and boat owner. Trim owned one fishing boat and operated two additional boats owned by Mr. Wassung. He gave Wassung 20 % of the catch and purchased it back at the same price he offered to fishing crews (SA, MES 75c). This was the customary boat owner's share at the time and SAFCSC also took 20 % of the catch of their motorboats (SA, MES 75d). Trim also operated his business with quotas and because the dinghies had a smaller range, catches were smaller than on the motorboats. Despite this, fishers could earn more crewing for Trim than they earned working on a company motorboat. Trim paid the same as the SAFCSC per fish, but he did not operate on the 50/50 system. Fishers working for him could also take as many fish home as they wanted. As skipper Hunter got one fish out of seven, earning £10 in good months. His crew earned between £5 and £7 per month. They could also go out when they pleased, in contrast to SAFCSC crews who had to content themselves with the company's schedule. Crewing on a dinghy was therefore preferable in many instances to crewing on a SAFCSC motorboat, but a lack of market access constrained these fishers' potential earnings. They could sell their excess catch locally while SAFCSC boat crews could not, but the local market was simply too small to absorb substantial quantities of fish. Hunter and his crew also struggled to find fish as he complained that the local trawlers scraped the bottom clean, causing the fish to leave their former habitats to search for food (SA, MES 75c).

These differences in employment conditions illustrate a crucial difference between the linefishing industry and the industrial fisheries. Traditional linefishing operated in the realm of affective relationships, or, in the words of Lance van Sittert, fishers perceived themselves as "co-adventurers" with the boat owner or skipper they worked for (Van Sittert, 1992: xxii). In contrast, work on the motorboats essentially amounted to a variation of the piecework system. Crewing for a motorboat also required less skill. Fishers were essentially passengers until they reached the destination decided on by the skipper. While a rowboat crew could fish for subsistence when the fish market was bad, the cost of running a motorboat meant subsistence fishing was no longer viable. In fact, as Essau mentioned above, the company calculated its costs so finely that fishers were only allowed to take one fish home per trip. But, as discussed in the next section, this piecework system ultimately became problematic for the fishing companies.

Hunter and his crew were lucky that they had a contract with Trim. Other handline fishers supplied local traders and hawkers at a first-come, first-serve basis with the fishing boat first to shore able to negotiate the best prices. When the trawlers made good kob catches, the local market was glutted and handline fishers could not sell their catch (SA, MES 75e). In these conditions fishers were lucky to earn £1:10 per week (which was not a liveable wage). Handline fishers also complained again that trawlers run at them when they were fishing in what were formerly traditional linefishing areas and that trawler discards polluted the ocean floor (SA, MES 75f; SA, MES 75 g).

But the SAFCSC had its own problems caused by the scarcity of sole and the depressed market for fish. Wadner complained that there was still good demand for sole, but that 'good sized' sole could no longer be caught at Mossel Bay, suggesting that trawlers had overfished in the past (SA, MES 75d). The problem of trawlers catching undersized sole was addressed by the Division of Fisheries that same year with the trawl experiments conducted by J.M. Marchand and minimum mesh size regulations were introduced (Marchand, 1932; Cape Province, 1937: Proclamation 151). However, the problem of discarding fish offal and bycatch remained difficult to address. SAFCSC operated a white fishmeal factory in Mossel Bay, but the production process was wasteful and expensive (SA, MES 75d). In addition, fishmeal was not yet a trusted livestock feed in South Africa in the 1930s (SA, HEN 1539) and the country's depressed agricultural sector was not in a position to purchase the fishmeal at a price that would make SAFCSC's fishmeal operation truly profitable. The company therefore had to sell its fishmeal at cost price but even then could not sell its total supply (SA, MES 75d).

At that stage, the trawlers were employed to target valuable linefish species specifically and if the trawlers made good catches motorboats would not be sent out that week. Wadner stated that trawlers sometimes went out to fish for red fish and Dageraad (*Chrysoblephus cristiceps*, family *Sparidae*) especially (SA, MES 75d). However, fishers could not help noting that the SAFCSC seemed to deliberately trawl for kob, a valued linefish, and did so close to shore: "To excuse this fishing close to shore they tell us that at certain times of the year soles come into shallow water but it is a remarkable fact that these periods always coincide with the kabeljauw [sic] coming in close for spawning purposes" (SA, MES 75 g). The SAFCS fishing statistics for the 1930s supports this allegation. Some months the trawlers caught more kob than any other type of fish and the trawlers caught substantial amounts of kob each month (CA, PAS 3/217). In fact, so much kob was caught that Wadner testified it was in oversupply and that the company struggled to get rid of it (SA, MES 75f).

The inadequate facilities at the harbour were again a major topic for complaint. Handline fishers had great difficulty getting fish ashore in heavy weather and their boats often capsized. The public water pump in the harbour (still) did not work and with only two fish cleaning stations available, catches from different boats were difficult to keep separate. Theft was also a problem and fish could not be left out to dry. While Trim built up a modest business supplying fish to Calitzdorp, Graaff Reinet, Oudtshoorn and George, he could not expand his business because he did not have access to cold storage and did not always manage to obtain ice (SA, MES 75e).

Trim and Wassung agreed that the lack of shelter at Mossel Bay harbour made investing in motorboats inadvisable. Wassung, a member of the Harbour Advisory Board, was an indifferent participant in the fishing industry. After a rowboat capsized and its crew were lost, a number of rowboats owned by the coloured fishing community were condemned. The coloured fishers thereafter appealed to him to purchase some boats so that they could have employment. According to Wassung, operating sailing vessels was not very profitable, but he believed outfitting his two boats with engines would be too risky. Without the breakwater, south easterly swells entered the harbour, dashing smaller boats to pieces on the harbour wall and silting up the harbour with sand (SA, MES 75a).

This and similar appeals fell on deaf ears: Although Mossel Bay was the closest port to a number of Central Karroo towns, SAR&H deliberately side-lined Mossel Bay in their developmental planning. It also employed the Motor Carrier Transportation Act of 1930 to quash the development of independent transport operators in the area. Mossel Bay harbour was historically underdeveloped because it was separated from the Karroo by mountain ranges and Karroo-bound goods were therefore railed from either Cape Town or Port Elizabeth. But with the advent of motorized transport Mossel Bay could potentially become a viable port. Before the Motor Carrier Transportation Act of 1930, independent truckers moved goods from Mossel Bay to Beaufort West, Carnarvon, Fraserburg and other Karroo towns, opening a market for Mossel Bay handline fishers (SA, MES 75 h).

After Cape Town and Port Elizabeth harbours were upgraded, SAR&H wanted to protect its investment (SA, HEN 3238). They therefore ensured that trucking from Mossel Bay harbour to Beaufort West and further afield were restricted through high licence fees under the Motor Carrier Transportation Act. SAR&H also charged high rates on their own truck route from Mossel Bay to the Central Karroo. These developments not only stymied the ability of Mossel Bay fishers to develop independent markets but contributed to general economic stagnation in the broader region (Hupkes and Verburgh, 1962: 98–100, 107–9). Throughout the 1930s, SAR&H also opposed any improvements at Mossel Bay harbour that would encourage traffic at the port (SA, HEN 3238).

The white handline fishers who testified before the board again campaigned for a small boat harbour at Munro's Bay. Two failed fishing entrepreneurs complained that they had to give up their motorboats because of the lack of shelter in the harbour. Without moorage, handline fishers' boats had to be small enough to be dragged up the beach. But small boats had a shorter range and could not go out in heavy weather, severely constraining the regularity of handline catches (SA, MES 75 h; SA, MES 75i; SA, MES 75 g).

Most of these fishers believed that access to bigger boats and cold storage facilities would allow them to develop markets in inland towns. Some handline fishers, with the anti-capitalist bias typical of the period, believed that the trawling companies did not supply these towns because they charged exploitatively high prices for fresh fish (SA, MES 75i). But it was not clear that this was the case: being able to supply fresh fish on a regular basis was not sufficient for good fish sales since the market for fish in these small towns was small and price inelastic while the railway rate for fish fresh was high, rendering these markets unprofitable (SA, MES 75j).

Outside of coastal centres, per capita fish consumption in South Africa in the 1930s was well below that of other fishing nations like the US, UK, Norway and Japan: A study commissioned by the Board of Trade and Industries found that fish consumption per capita in South Africa was a meagre 4.5 lb per annum. This was partially due to the fact that consumers did not trust the quality of fish they bought from inland fish mongers (Union of South Africa, 1934) and because fish consumption amongst Africans was low (Van Sittert, 1994). Consumers also wanted fresh and not frozen fish so fishing companies could keep fish no longer than 3 of 4 days in cold storage before shipping (SA, MES 75f). The Board of Trade and Industry wanted the government to fund an advertising campaign praising the nutritional value of fish and to convince them that

freezing did not affect fish quality. It was hoped that such a public awareness campaign would raise demand, but a greater problem was the relatively high price of fish in relation to meat. During the Depression meat prices in South Africa plummeted by 29 % while the prices of less desirable fish species stayed stable and the price for sole increased by 11 % from 1929 to 1933. In these circumstances fresh fish became a luxury item for cash strapped South African consumers (Union of South Africa, 1934). It is therefore unlikely that handline fishers, who had been unable to develop a market for their fish when demand was higher, would have been able to compete successfully for market access while demand was low.

Wadner, chairman of SAFCSC, discussed in some detail how the lower demand for fish affected his company: Demand for fish declined so much that SAFCSC limited their catches to 15000lbs (6.8 t) per week, but Wadner claimed that they could not sell fish for less because the company's operating costs were still high (SA, MES 75f). In this difficult commercial climate, it made sound financial sense for SAFCSC to sell out to I&J. The takeover late in 1929 gave the company access to I&J's country-wide distribution network: I&J set up a quota system with each of its affiliates supplying a certain market. So SAFCSC, which still traded under its own name until the mid-1950s, supplied markets in Johannesburg exclusively. The company therefore no longer had to compete for market share (SA, MES 75i). By 1930, I&J and its affiliates dominated the South African trawling industry and its efficient distribution network became the envy of other fishing sectors. The company was also twice investigated for monopolistic practices by the Board of Trade and Industries during 1925 and 1926 (Lees, 1969: 75). Retailers used to having a choice in suppliers, suddenly found that previous competitors now belonged to the same parent company and charged the same prices. I&J also refused to supply retailers who were not regular customers. This meant that smaller operations which may have charged lower prices but could not deliver fish as regularly as I&J were effectively cut from the market (Union of South Africa, 1926).

According to the Board of Trade and Industries, "...in certain inland centres [I&J] practically control the bulk of the fish supply, which puts them in an advantageous position as regards possible market control as well as control of the dealer-buyers" (Union of South Africa, 1926: 26). But the Board of Trade and Industries could not find enough evidence to convict I&J of unfair business practices. I&J defended itself by stating that its quota system did not allow for occasional, unexpected sales, especially in slow fishing seasons, and that they had a responsibility to their loyal customers first before supplying others. Buying out its competition was also not illegal and the company had the right to arrange its distribution network as it chose. With no evidence of I&J directly pressuring fish retailers the investigation was inconclusive (Union of South Africa, 1926). Many consumers believed that the high fish prices that obtained during the Depression were a result of the company's monopolistic ability to control fish supplies. But the Board of Trade and Industries found that, despite these accusations, trawler companies were not making excessive profits. The Depression did not lower the companies' overhead costs while lower demand increased the cost per fish caught. Lowering fish prices was therefore not feasible and the board considered vertical integration in the trawling sector to make sound business sense (Union of South Africa, 1934).

The I&J takeover was lucrative for SAFCSC shareholders: the company could pay out a 30 % dividend in 1929 and 1930 and 15 % in 1931. But this profit was made by

rationalizing their fishing operations at the expense of the handline fishers in their employ. Like other boat owners, the company took 20 % of the catch to cover operating costs and bought the rest of the fish from the fishers by weight. However, since the company adopted the I&J quota system handline fishers' wages declined from £5 or £6 to £1 or £1:10 per week. As discussed above, fishers could not subsist on these wages and were immiserated. Wadner acknowledges that handline fishers' incomes declined, but claimed that the company could not profitably buy more fish (SA, MES 75f).

Debating fishery economics in the 1930s and 1940s

The Board of Trade and Industry therefore found the inshore fishing industry as problematic as the Harbour Commission did almost a decade earlier. In contrast to the latter, the Board found that large stretches of the South African coastline were not suited to harbour development. In many areas boats would therefore necessarily have to stay small, limiting the fishing technology fishers could use and also limiting their catch. But the fishers were also not making the most of the resources they did have. Middlemen were still profiting while inshore fishers did not receive fair wholesale prices (SA, MES 75 k). This was due to the fact that, in the words of the board, "the selling arrangements of these people [were] extremely primitive they [were] unorganized and as a consequence are unable to stand up to present day conditions" (SA, MES 75 k: 45–6). The board also believed help for the inshore fishers could only come from outside since the fishers did not have the skills or capital necessary to improve their position and were unlikely to attract these resources from the private sector. The government therefore envisioned creating a regulatory environment that would benefit the inshore industry by instituting controls over the fish retail sector, by controlling fish hawkers and by reserving certain inland markets for the inshore industry exclusively (SA, MES 75 k). This was seen as necessary since the government did not believe that the inshore industry would be able to compete with the efficiency of the trawling industry even if it had better boats and gear (Union of South Africa, 1934). Alternatively, Commerce and Industries recommended setting up a distribution network under government aegis to rival that of the trawling industry. The inshore industry was to be organized into co-operatives overseen by a central, government-run co-operative trading company managed by an officer within the Fisheries Division. The trading company would also serve as a vehicle through which government funding in the form of low interest loans could be channelled towards the inshore co-operatives (SA, MES 75 k).

Debates about the direction government intervention in the fishing sector should take continued through the 1930s and cumulated in the 1944 Fishing Industry Development Act. The bill for this act was composed by M. Sonnenberg, MP for the South Peninsula, and F.P. Spooner, a consultant to the Department of Commerce and Industry. Spooner, who was the more outspoken of the two, had a marked prejudice against free market capitalism. He was, however, equally opposed to independent small-scale fishers. For him organization was a hallmark of civilization and the inshore sector's lack of organization therefore explained this sector's economic troubles. But despite his opinion that fishers often doomed themselves to an impoverished hand-to-mouth existence due to their own 'improvidence,' he believed they should nonetheless be assisted in the name of progress (CA, F.S. 1/17).

The fishing companies were aware of the hostile attitude towards them from certain sectors of government and testimonies before the parliamentary committee on the bill were therefore heated. According to the chairman of I&J, H. Abao, Spooner sent advanced copies of the bill to fishing companies accompanied with a letter threatening them with nationalization. Spooner in turn believed that the fishing companies were profiteering and accused them of massaging the financial reports they submitted to the committee to misrepresent their profits (Union of South Africa, 1944). But a blow by blow account of the committee sittings is not necessary here. The government eventually did not nationalize the fishing industry, it did not establish a centralized fish marketing board and did not assist impoverished fishing communities like that of Still Bay to form co-operatives. The para-statal formed after the Act was passed, the Fisheries Development Corporation (FDC), was also largely only active on the west coast. The testimonies of the fishing companies do, however, give a unique vantage point on the relationship between the fishing companies and the linefishing sector.

From memorandums presented by I&J, the National Trawling and Fishing Company (NTFC) and a Cape Town-based consortium, the Wholesale Fish Distributors, it emerged that linefishing used to be a necessary companion to the trawling sector. There were consumer resistance against trawled hake (*Merluccius capensis* and *Merluccius paradoxus*) during the 1930s. This resulted in a great deal of hake being discarded at sea⁷ and hake was usually sold together with popular linefish in order to convince consumers to buy it. Before the war, fish sellers could differentiate the price of their fish to account for both the greater per unit cost involved with catching linefish and the increased scarcity of the fish, but the Office of the Price Controller did not accommodate this practice (Union of South Africa, 1944). War time price controls made fish less expensive than meat and raised consumer demand, but trawling companies faced lower per unit profits as their inputs were more expensive due to wartime scarcity. With trawlers requisitioned for the war effort, companies also could not simply recoup their losses by catching more fish. This situation forced trawling companies to greatly increase their efficiency. This reorganisation process delivered spectacular results: I&J managed to increase their efficiency of their trawling sector to the extent that per unit cost returned to pre-war levels by 1941 (Van Sittert, 1994). However, trawling concerns, wholesalers and others registered as fish retailers had to absorb extra costs while they were also forced to sell linefish at the same price as the trawled product. In contrast, independent handline fishers were not registered as fish retailers and therefore could and did sell their catch at any price the market could bear. With the number of fishers having declined due to alternative employment available during the war, smaller landings of fish due to the requisitioning of the trawler fleet and the increasing scarcity of linefish, especially along False Bay and the Cape Peninsula, handline fishers could and did charge greater amounts of money for their catch than in the pre-war period. This caused wholesalers and fishing companies, feeling squeezed by customer tastes and handline fishers' opportunism, to re-evaluate their relationship with the traditional linefishing sector (Union of South Africa, 1944).

Some of the member companies of the Wholesale Fish Distributors also owned a number of motor-driven schooners. War time conditions made them re-evaluate the value of these vessels. The schooners could stay out for a week, which gave their fleet enough time to fish off the south coast for linefish before they had to return to Cape

Town. But J.F. Stubbs, the consortium's representative, testified that these fishing ventures were not profitable. In fact, Stubbs believed that this linefishing fleet had never been profitable (Union of South Africa, 1944). Dr J.G. van der Horst and Mr R.W. Overstone, representatives of NTFC, testified that the cost of maintaining their linefishing fleet combined with the few days the fleet could fish and the low price set for fish by the Price Controller meant that they operated this section of their business at a loss. When they bought linefish from independent fishers, they also apparently suffered a loss. Apparently the Trawler and Line Fishermen's Union (TLFU) forced them to pay their handline fishers at Port Elizabeth more than the profit they generated for the company. Due to the few days per month this fleet could fish, even this higher salary still did not provide the handline fishers with a living wage. The company saw this as illustrative of the nature of the linefishing industry in general: Even though the handline fishers were still not earning sufficient income, they would be even worse off on their own because then they would have had to bear the cost of maintaining fishing vessels themselves (Union of South Africa, 1944).

Abao claimed that I&J could buy out their competitors because of the liability presented by these companies' linefishing vessels. The general low demand for fish in South Africa combined with the high costs involved in catching linefish made linefishing a losing proposition. In addition to the inherent unprofitability of this sector of the industry, I&J also complained about their inability to discipline the crew of linefishing vessels. This returns the discussion to the problem of how fishing companies were to incorporate handline fishers in an industrial setting. The absolute authority of skippers over the ship's crew at sea together with the fact that relatively unskilled junior deckhands could easily be replaced served to discipline them. They were subject to labour contracts and in turn earned a negotiated salary (Van Sittert, 1994). In contrast, the occasional nature of linefishing meant that they did not have set contracts or work times. In these circumstances various social ills, including alcohol addiction, could allegedly flourish. Abao had a harsh opinion of the handline fishers employed by his company: "Although their earnings depend on their own exertions we find that they are for the most part lazy, and that as soon as they earn a few pounds the majority of them prefer to stay ashore and drink until their pockets are empty" (Union of South Africa, 1944: 222). Such fishers were highly unreliable, but because they were skilled handline fishers they could not be dispensed with. I&J therefore sometimes struggled to crew their linefishing boats and lost valuable fishing time. But because consumers wanted variety, I&J had to continue operating their linefishing boats at a loss. For Abao the fact that these fishers earned very low wages should have motivated them to work more, not less. He therefore wanted the government to intervene between them and the handline fishers in their employ to somehow compel them to be a more productive labour force (Union of South Africa, 1944).

I&J were not alone in stigmatizing handline fishers as alcoholics, the other fishing companies were simply more circumspect. So the NTFC protested that not all inshore fishers were indolent and intemperate but when pressed they acknowledged that some social upliftment in fishing villages were required. Their hesitancy was, however, motivated less by their desire not to offend their employees but by the fear that the government would hold them responsible for their employees' social welfare. Unsurprisingly, the fishers with the most "social problems" were the poorly paid handline fishers. Like

I&J), the directors of the NTFC absolved themselves of responsibility for the low wages paid to their handline fishers since it was seen merely as a consequence of the few days they fished (Union of South Africa, 1944).

Van Sittert (1994) describes the labour relations between trawler crews and fishing companies during the Second World War when adverse working conditions led to a series of strikes and the formation of the TLFU in 1943. The TLFU could negotiate with companies and the Department of Labour to ensure better wages and working conditions for their members. Incorporating labour into collective bargaining processes reduced labour unrest and so the fishing companies acquiesced to unionisation. Despite its name, however, the TLFU did not manage to recruit many handline fishers. Independent boat owners were not interested in unionisation and the union struggled to gather membership fees from the handline fishers who did join. This means these fishers were seldom incorporated into the collective bargaining supported by the Department of Labour.

Handline fishers were landing species that were preferred by consumers and the fish were becoming scarce due to overfishing. Ideally then they should have earned a premium for their fish but they were instead earning sub-economic wages that condemned them to squalor. At the time there were two rival explanations for this. Government officials like Spooner and others in the Department of Social Welfare held that handline fishers were being exploited by fish hawkers and other middlemen who did not pay them a fair price for their catch. Boat owners also exploited their crew since their "... share of the fish caught, as compared with that received by the crew, was out of all proportion to the services rendered or to the capital invested" (Union of South Africa, 1944: i). On the other hand, the trawling industry argued that the problem was not monopolistic exploitation, but high costs and low consumer demand. Fishing companies had to be vertically integrated because a captive market was necessary for survival. Not enough is known about fishing effort, boat operating cost, fish prices or transportation cost in the early twentieth century to judge whether the prices paid to handline fishers and those charged for consumers were fair or not (Stohr, 1977). It seems, however, that there is consensus amongst historians that the low demand for fish together with South Africa's dispersed population and consequently high transportation cost naturally lead to monopoly formation in the industrial fishing sector (Van Sittert, 1994; Stohr, 1977).

Curiously, the concerns about fish scarcity and declining catch per unit effort in the linefishing sector raised by the fishing companies did not generate any interests with the committee members. Von Bonde blithely assured the committee that there was no evidence that trawling spoiled linefishing grounds, that there was no justification for a three mile trawling exclusionary zone and that linefish species were not in decline. His explanation for bad fishing seasons and increased effort was that fish were migrating 'elsewhere' (Union of South Africa, 1944). Although there are no official fishing statistics to confirm increased linefish scarcity at the time, the increased distance from shore handline fishers had to brave in the 1930s provided evidence for this. The fact that their wooden dinghies were unsuited to the deep ocean further underlines the economic hardship caused by the fish scarcity (SA, MES 75 k).

It was soon clear that the Fishing Industry Development Act did not enhance the economic opportunities of small-scale fishers. Perversely, the FDC strengthened the

role of large fishing companies since funding to improve fishers' living conditions was channelled through established commercial interests. A number of small fishing harbours was built, Still Bay got its boating platform and the breakwater at Mossel Bay harbour was completed. But the government did not intervene to improve the marketing conditions of small-scale fishers (South African Parliament, 22 May 1950). War-time price controls and the scarcity of meat made per capita fish consumption soar in the 1940s and the resultant increased demand for fish caused a post-war boom in the fishing industry (South African Parliament, 23 June 1959). However, handline fishers remained on the periphery. With fish scarcity already a factor in the first half of the twentieth century, the handline fishing sector became increasingly unattractive for capital investment. Fishing companies who already secured a sophisticated marketing network no longer had to invest in the handline fishing industry since fishers in many cases had to sell to them or their wholesale affiliates. They could therefore deliver linefish to their customers without taking on the risk of fishing in a sector with declining catch per unit effort and irregular labour relations. The unorganized nature of the handline fishing sector also meant that they never gained sufficient bargaining power to shift rising costs to wholesalers and consumers.

Conclusion

The conflict between commercial handline and inshore bottom trawl fisheries on the eastern Agulhas Bank off the southern Cape coast should be set against decades of indifferent government management of both these fisheries. While the Great Depression could be blamed for government tardiness in the matter of small harbour construction, the failure of government to develop any of the recommendations in the Board of Trade and Industry's report on the fishing industry is more puzzling. The government at the time was populist and was willing to intervene directly in the economy to benefit its poor white supporters. Despite this, government found it best not to interfere with the workings of the market as it concerned the fishing industry and monopolistic practices by big fishing companies was instead praised as efficiency. This cumulated with the 1944 Fishing Industry Development Act: Instead of nationalising the fishing industry to assist small-scale fishers, the Act created a parastatal that channelled money towards established companies.

As discussed above, handline fishing gradually developed from subsistence to a commercial fishery as population pressure forced people out of the agricultural sector. But the sector was economically marginal: income was low, fishers could not market their catch effectively and trawlers denuded traditional linefishing grounds and pushed fishers further out to sea beyond the safe range of their wooden row or sail boats. In this climate the characteristic structure of the current handline fishery developed as coloured fishers could not afford to purchase more sophisticated boats and had to accept positions on white-owned fishing vessels.

The marginalisation of the Still Bay handline fishers and the trouble Mossel Bay handline fishers experienced due to the dominance of the SAFCS in the region were part of a slew of similar testimonies that influenced the Board of Trade and Industry to recommend government intervention in the fishing industry in the 1930s. Government's subsequent failure to assist the handline fishers entrenched their marginality. The government therefore

defaulted to free market orthodoxy were the SSF sector was concerned when the matter first gained political prominence, much like it defaulted to neo-liberalism when fishery reforms again became important post 1994. The reasons for these defaults are also broadly similar: government lacked the capacity or will to assist communities in building management capacity and do not trust them to develop such capacity without assistance. At the eve of the implementation of South Africa's new SSF policy, the condition of many handline fishers are therefore similar to that of the early twentieth century counterparts. The proposed solution is again to organize the fishers into co-operatives so that they would have more bargaining power, to impart business skills to fishers through various training initiatives and to provide them with access to funding (Department of Agriculture Forestry and Fisheries, 2012). This time around, however, the policy is not endangered only by opposition from the industrial fisheries but by the critical depletion of the most valuable SSF resources, including linefish.

Endnotes

¹The South African 2012 SSF policy define small-scale fishers as “persons that fish to meet food and basic livelihood needs, or are directly involved in harvesting / processing or marketing of fish, traditionally operate on or near shore fishing grounds, predominantly employ traditional low technology or passive fishing gear, usually undertake single day fishing trips, and are engaged in the sale or barter or are involved in commercial activity.” The most commercially valuable species in this sector is rock lobster and abalone. Small-scale fishers also exploit linefish, seaweed, mussels, octopus, sand and mud prawns, limpets and red bait, periwinkle, crabs, oysters, sea lice and worms and net for small pelagic fish. In the first half of the twentieth century, the small-scale sector was called the “inshore fisheries”.

²The Goukou River underwent a name change since the end of apartheid. Its previous name contained a racial slur and will therefore not be used in the text.

³I&J claims that it retains no records from the period prior to 1950 when the company became a subsidiary of Anglovaal. No information about the activities of SAFCS at Mossel Bay could therefore be recovered from I&J. Personal email from I&J Consumer Care, 16 October 2013.

⁴An “outspan” was a piece of government land reserved for grazing. Travellers with draft animals and livestock farmers taking their animals to market used these outspans as campsites for a small fee. With the advent of rail and automobiles outspans were no longer needed and the land was sold off.

⁵The Carnegie Commission of Investigation on the Poor White Question in South Africa was funded by the Carnegie Foundation at the request of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC). South Africa experienced a number of severe droughts in the 1920s and early 1930s which, together with the effects of the Great Depression, increased rural poverty and accelerated urbanization. Unskilled white rural migrants struggled to find employment in their new urban setting and congregated in shanty towns. The commission produced a lengthy report that not only described the size of the poor white population in South Africa, but enumerated the various social ills ranging from intemperance to idleness that was apparently prevalent amongst the poor. The report tends to conflate these social ills with negative character traits that, via an implicit

appeal to eugenic theories popular at the time, caused the poor to be blamed for their poverty.

⁶The 1926 and 1931 censuses unfortunately only counted white South Africans. Full censuses were conducted in 1921 and 1936 but Depression-era population mobility means these censuses are not useful for determining the population of coloureds and Africans in the towns mentioned during the early 1930s.

⁷See Von Bonde's testimony before the 1944 Select Committee on Subject of the Fishing Industry Development Bill. During the 1936 west coast trawl investigations it was discovered that commercial trawlers dumped all hake under 3 lb and over 6 lb. Von Bonde saw a trawler dumping 52 (or 2.5 t) of the 105 baskets of fish caught during its trip. Some of the local boats actually followed trawlers and gathered up the floating dead fish to sell at Cape Town. Government regulations in 1937 to increase the mesh size of the cod end of trawl nets used on the west coast managed to reduce dumping from 50 to 60 % to 10 %. Dumping was prohibited by the Sea Fisheries Act of 1940, but it is unclear whether this legislation was strictly enforced.

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

Authors' contribution

NV conducted all of the research and drafted the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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