

Response to follow-on set of questions posed by reporter Ms Anina Peens on the 21 August 2020; Ms Peens' questions appear in parenthesis:

“Note to preamble:

I am sure you are aware that the Renosterberg municipality has just been placed under administration. It is also a well-known fact that the senior officials of this municipality enjoy some of the highest municipal salaries in the country.

In addition, municipality representative on the Rhodes Rural fisheries project, according to the Experimental fisheries management plan, resigned from council after suspension letters were against him”.

We have repeatedly requested a meeting with you to discuss the relevant issues that follow below; because of the complexity of the project and the complexity of how our approach informs what we have done at Vanderkloof Dam. Unfortunately our requests have been met with the response that there can be a meeting just prior to filming. Given the complexity of the project this is wholly inadequate and we believe that we are not being given the chance to adequately place your leading and directive questions in context. This results in us not being given an adequate right of reply.

We can only assume that you have not yet realised the real importance of the how the technical nature of the project informs what is happening on the dam, and this has resulted in some misconceptions – which are made apparent in the questions that follow here.

We will do our best to address this so that you can gain a better understanding of this project and contextualise the answers to your questions accordingly.

Follow up Questions:

1. “You state that Rhodes University is not responsible for gear used in the project. According to our research, Qurban Rouhani and Warwick Sauer decided on every piece of equipment and gear necessary for the project. Quotes were sent to the department, which either Sauer or Rouhani signed off and the invoices were paid for by Rhodes. Do you agree that the funds are thus managed by Rhodes, specifically by the project leaders Qurban Rouhani and Warwick Sauer?”

This is factually incorrect.

Rouhani is the Director of the Rural Fisheries Unit and is the leader and administrator of this project.

Sauer was the HOD during much of the life of this project, and assists (from experience in the marine sector) in the Ecosystems Approach to Fisheries (EAF), and the technical aspects.

The Advisory Committee is responsible for the *Experimental Fisheries Management Plan*, and therefore the choice of gear.

Once the plan was accepted by the Advisory Committee (i.e. the committee that had full representation of all role players), Rural Fisheries Unit undertook the experiment and applied the methods and materials (i.e. fishing gears that included, among others, gill nets) stipulated in the *Experimental Fisheries Management Plan*.

We point out that Rural Fisheries Unit staff do not decide on any gear to be used, but act on the plan, purchase of equipment and the scientific aspects of the study that were stipulated by project's Advisory Committee who oversaw and agreed on the *Experimental Fisheries Management Plan*.

2. "The use of gill nets was heavily opposed by the advisory group from the outset, to the extent that some senior scientists stepped down from the committee. Are you aware of this? If you were not aware, did your representatives not provide you with reports of this?"

This is factually incorrect and we urge you to approach the Chair of the Advisory Group.

Certain members of the group were opposed, others were for their use; the debate and scientific input was handled in detail and the group collectively decided on their inclusion.

We are unaware of any senior scientists that gave their intention to resign, or resigned from the Advisory Committee as a result of the gill net issue, either in writing to the Committee or verbally to the Committee. We urge you to meet with the Chair of the Committee to determine if this indeed did occur.

3. "According to our sources, Rouhani blatantly ignored all advice given by professional scientists against the use of gill nets. His mandate to project employees to acquire gillnets is proof of this. Were you aware of this? Can you dispute this?"

This is factually incorrect.

There are a number of reputable, professional and independent scientists on the Advisory Committee –

We reiterate that it is the Advisory Committee that made decisions on which gear should be tested, after lengthy discussions and debate based on previous scientific findings.

Gill nets could only be used if the Advisory Committee gave the go ahead through the *Experimental Fisheries Management Plan*. No gill nets were used prior to final acceptance of the *Experimental Fisheries Management Plan* by the Advisory Committee.

4. “Considering that this is a research project, why did fishing continue if data was not being collated to assess the impact?”

Again, it would be useful if the science and structure of the project were fully understood. The purpose of fishing is not to assess the impact of the fishery on the yellowfish populations. As stated before, this was not the mandate of the Rural Fisheries Unit. The purpose of the experimental fishery is to assess the feasibility of a fishery on the dam, and to determine (based on the number of yellow fish that are or are not caught; based on the number of other fish that are or are not caught; based on markets; based on all aspects of stakeholders involved etc. etc...) if this fishery will be sustainable in terms of both the fish in the dam, the ecology and the fishery itself, or not.

Please be aware that the approach of the Advisory Committee, which is in line with the Ecosystems Approach to Fisheries (EAF) which is used by the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), is to gather non-subjective fishery data under real-life conditions, including real fish and real people, in a real environment, highlighting real environmental considerations, and to present these data to the Northern Cape Government so that it can make an informed management decision:

- The recommendation might be that a small scale fishery is feasible;
- It might be that a fishery is feasible under certain conditions only;
- The recommendation might be that it is not feasible.

No fully informed decisions can be made if the project does not collect data to inform the decision.

5. "If permit conditions were violated, the exemption of the permit that allows the project to catch Largemouth yellow fish was automatically suspended. What processes were followed to renew the permit and which department signed off the permit and the new exemption?"

This should be raised with both the Chair of the Advisory Committee and DENC

We have replied to this at length in the previous correspondence and provided the amended permit.

It is not possible to set precise size limits on fish that may be caught in gillnets. Although gillnets are size selective depending on the mesh size used (that is, mesh size is used to target a size range of fish using this gear), there will ALWAYS be a variation in the size of the fish caught in a gill net on either side of the target size range. Therefore, it is erroneous to include a size limit when using this fishing gear, because and to repeat, the fishing gear will always catch fish on either side of the target size, which is set by the size of the mesh. It is therefore not possible to implement a size limit when using gill nets to catch fish.

It was acknowledged by the Advisory Committee (with all stakeholders represented) and it was acknowledged by the government department responsible for issuing the original permit (all of who contributed to the developing the *Experimental Fishery Management Plan*) that it was NEVER the intention of the permit to impose a size limit when using gillnets. To repeat, the inclusion of a size limit on the original permit was acknowledged as an error by all concerned, and this error was corrected when the permit was renewed.

With regards to the suspension of the original permit, it must be noted that at the time that the error on that permit was identified, no fishing was taking place and the permit was thus not being used. Furthermore, fishing did not recommence until after the error was corrected and the renewed permit was issued.

6. "If new permit conditions allow the project the catch fish of any size, how will Rhodes Rural fisheries project ensure the sustainability of the fish resource?"

The *Experimental Fisheries Management Plan* refers. A precautionary approach is taken, with a set amount of fish to be caught, along with other measures. This is in line with best practice. There has been no change to that aspect of the *Experimental Fisheries Management Plan*.

7. "The management plan states that 30 LMY are allowed to be caught monthly. Who manages this and where are the reports on the compliance of this monthly catch?"

The Rural Fisheries Unit has a staff complement at Van Der Kloof, comprising a scientific officer, skipper, crew, administrator and community liaison officer. If there is any evidence of wrongdoing by any staff member this should be brought to the attention of the Advisory Committee and the Rural Fisheries Unit.

We also urge you to approach DENC who will be able to fill you in on their own measures.

8. "In a telephonic conversation with Warwick Sauer, he suggested that if more than the monthly quota of LMY is caught, the community will see it and possibly report it. Is this the way in which Rhodes ensure that the LMY population in the dam is not depleted?"

Please refer to the above. Warwick Sauer suggested that if there is any evidence of wrongdoing by any staff member this should be brought to the attention of the Advisory Committee and the Rural Fisheries Unit, and that with Van der Kloof being a small town, and the high visibility of the project, such wrongdoing may be detected, as any member of the public can inspect the catches.

9. "Please specify the training that the local fishermen received, dates of training, type of training, duration and number of fishermen trained?"

Please see the attached reports that include the detail of this training.

10. "How was the price of the fish sold to the fishermen determined? Considering that a catfish can weigh more per kilogram than a mudfish, for example. We are also aware that the fish are not cleaned when sold which increases the weight and decreases the profit for the fishermen supposed to sell it?"

The price of fish was determined by the fishers themselves. Based on information they provided, the price of fish they normally sold to the public was determined (this would be fish which they would have caught in the kraals). They then agreed on a price at which they

would buy from the project, which was marked down considerably, so that they could then sell it on to the public at a profit.

11. “The fishermen say they cannot afford to buy the fish from the project and have to fish to make a living. If they cannot purchase fish from the project, does this not raise questions on economic viability of the project?”

These are issues which are raised at the Advisory Group meetings and decisions on prices are then decided on by the committee, and the fishers have representation on the Advisory Group.

12. Who are the auditors to the project? Have audit reports been furnished annually to the university?

We are under contract to the Northern Cape Government. The University is not the official spokesperson of this project, and we do not have the right to furnish a journalist with either the contracts or any audited statements. You will need to approach the Northern Cape Province Government if you want this kind of information.

We can, however, assure you that all Rhodes University accounts are subject to a combined assurance audit framework, and this applies to all finances managed by Rhodes University, including those of this project. This combined assurance framework, comprises both external and internal audit functions. The term “internal audit” is used in the technical auditing sense. It is not internal to the Finance Division of the institution, but is an independent auditing resource driven by the Council Audit Committee, and has the function of drilling down in areas of specific interest, such as departments or divisions where there is financial complexity or concern about financial controls, or any other specific area needing detailed attention in the view of the Council Audit Committee. This is as opposed to the umbrella “external” auditor, whose responsibility is to undertake the overall institutional statutory audit. Overall, it is a strong audit framework. The current External Auditor is PricewaterhouseCoopers, and the Internal Auditor has recently been switched to Ernst & Young. The audit companies are reviewed periodically (every 5 years), and the company or audit partner changed as part of the assurance model.

In addition, as part of the internal accounting practice at Rhodes University, all transactions are subject to scrutiny at various levels. They are first signed off in the department by pre-specified signatories, then they are checked against budget items and limits of expenditure by a research finance clerk in the central finance office (independent of the department),

before being signed off by a senior finance manager for payment. This process forms part of the audit requirement.

Specific research project accounts are subject to full audit, if: (a) internal processes identify a concern that warrants an audit (in which case they might also be subject to a forensic audit); or (b) the funding agent for the research project requests an external audit as part of the contract.

This project's accounts were subject to an audit carried out by the University's auditors in 2018 and this project's finances were included as part of that audit, which was carried out at a departmental level. The project is not subject to an annual external audit because it has not fallen into any of the categories that might require a project-specific audit. The projects accounts have, however, always formed part of the pool of accounts from which transactions are randomly selected during the university's annual audit (i.e. normal audit procedure).

We have no objection whatsoever in having this project's accounts audited externally for the period post-2018.