

Set of questions:

Can you kindly share with us the Ethical Clearance certificate/related document, issued by Rhodes University for the research to be conducted?

- Who is currently funding the project?
- Who is responsible for the auditing of the project's books: does it fall under Rhodes finance or does the project have private auditors?

Hi Nina

Thks for the questions.

I was hoping to go through much of this with you in person due to the complexity. But herewith some explanation prior to our meeting.

In order to clarify the process, it is in fact not required to fill in the ethics form at the University if the selection of sites and the establishment of a working relationship with interest groups (e.g. government departments and NGOs) prior to commencing with a specific project is carried out (instructions attached). Nevertheless, it has always been also our intention to maintain full ethical standards in accordance with Rhodes practice throughout this project and we have proceeded accordingly. As HOD at the time I was concerned over the complex stakeholders involved. I spoke to the head of the project Mr Rouhani, and others at Rhodes, and establishment of a working relationship with interest groups was the route suggested and followed. In terms of best practice, using an Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF, fao.org), such an undertaking is also advocated, so as to involve all stakeholders in the project from the outset to ensure a completely transparent process and get the expertise from stakeholders during the design phase.

An Advisory Committee with all stakeholders was formed and jointly planned the experiment including national government, the provincial government, subsistence/Kraal fisher's representatives, and a national recreational fisheries NGO. This was a very lengthy and extremely rigorous process, which took around 2 years as far as I recall. During this period, every aspect of the project was examined and discussed (repeatedly during numerous meetings), including the use of gill nets, which are not illegal, as explained below. Personally, I have never seen such an inclusive process to date.

Perhaps important to mention: Also under EAF an experiment should not only look at what can be caught sustainably, which is essential, but very importantly Government should also consider the economic issues and challenges (business planning) should a small scale commercial fishery be considered. This is particularly important when quotas are allocated to ensure the fishery is socially and economically sustainable too. This lesson is very apparent in the marine sector, with many failures over the years through a lack of such planning. However, this is a relatively new way of thinking and some traditional

ecologists tend to still disagree. This component forms a large portion of the experimental project.

At the same time there were numerous interventions through the Advisory Committee in terms of the Kraal fishers. This was badly needed and took an inordinate of time and effort. However I am unsure if this is part of your documentary?

After the project commenced, after 5 months of fishing and after receiving complaints from members of the fishing public related to the use of gill nets and the general experimental process, we decided, as an added independent measure and to allay any fears over the experimental process, to also go through the local Rhodes ethics committee. We hoped this would then serve to further underpin and reinforce the responsible, conservative approach being followed. I personally undertook this, hence my name on the official approval letter which I will attach.

This coincided with applying for permit renewals. There was no fishing for a period of some months while the permits were obtained, giving the members of the public who had complained the erroneous idea that the project had been stopped. We requested of them (and in fact any member of the public with concerns) to approach the Advisory Group, which could address these concerns and give an official response.

I hope this lengthy explanation puts the report I sent you into perspective. The report covers June 2019 to June 2020 and has the Rhodes University ethics clearance number. There will be another report for the next period.

Also just to provide clarity on your statement that gill nets are illegal.

In terms of permits and gill nets:

Permits: There are a number of permits that are required from different entities, and during periods when renewals were underway, or during the initial COVID lockdown, no fishing took place. Hence, you will see some months with no activity.

Gill nets:

The use of gill nets for experimental purposes in South Africa is not illegal, but requires a permit. There are numerous research projects on South African inland systems, which have used these, and numerous scientific articles in peer reviewed journals. These can be easily accessed.

As with most fishing gears, gillnets can be misused and can be a concern, particularly in developing countries. Any commercial introduction should be done only after careful consideration and with appropriate regulation.

I would suggest you look at the FAO website for gill net information and the use of gill nets as advocated by this international body. www.fao.org. This gear when used responsibly can be an effective management measure.

Gill nets are but one of the catching methods investigated and the goal of this experiment is to test a number of gears without undue impact on the ecology, taking into account all species caught, and any ecological damage. Hence, a precautionary approach is used. When a catching method is assessed, we look at

1. The catch of the target species
2. Any bycatch (i.e. catch of species other than the target species)
3. Any damage to the environment

Gill nets do result in some mortality prior to collection so it is often not possible to release fish back into the environment, which is taken into account in the precautionary approach used.

While it is therefore not possible to set precise size limits on fish that may be caught, gillnets are very size selective depending on the mesh size used and the way in which we manage the size of fish to be caught therefore is the selection of mesh sizes to be used in the experiment. The mesh sizes finally agreed on by the Advisory Group to be tested took the large mouth yellowfish into account, with a clear restriction on numbers that could be landed by all gears during one month,

There was some confusion over this by members of the public so I thought I would clarify. In terms of the other gears (longlines, seine nets, fyke nets) it is possible to place length restrictions as a conservation measure, and where appropriate these were introduced.

In terms of the future, once the fieldwork is complete, the draft report plus the draft scientific publications will be written and circulated through the Advisory Committee for input. A final report will then be available.

regards
Warwick