

Workshop report: meeting on the future of the Island Closures study

Monday 27 July

09h30 - 15h00

DAFF Research Aquarium, Beach Road, Sea Point

Attendees: Adri Meyer, Alistair McInnes, Astrid Jarre, Azwianewi Makhado, Carl van der Lingen, Christina Hagen, Doug Butterworth, Florian Weller, Hasie Terblanche, Herman Oosthuizen, Janet Coetzee, Johann Augustyn, John Duncan, Katrin Ludynia, Kevern Cochrane (Chair), Kim Prochazka, Lynne Shannon, Mike Copeland, Monica Betts, Richard Sherley (via Skype), Rob Crawford, Ross Wanless

1. Welcome and ground rules of meeting

The Chair welcomed all participants and started by reminding everyone why this study was in place (because of the needs of penguins, fishing industry, and people). He presented an extract from the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which states everyone has the right to have the environment protected but in a way that also promotes justifiable economic and social development. He reminded everyone of the “rules of engagement” suggested by George Branch.

2. Interdepartmental Cooperation

The Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), with CapeNature (CN) and other partners, has put in place an African Penguin Biodiversity Management Plan (AP-BMP) that was developed and promulgated in terms of the National Environmental Management Biodiversity Act. This plan was negotiated with and agreed by stakeholders and details management actions required for the conservation of African Penguins and organisations responsible for implementing them. Island closures are one of the management actions addressed by the plan and DEA is the responsible party for investigating and monitoring the possible impact of fishing near penguin colonies on the biology of African penguins (Action 4.3.1.2). DEA, as the responsible authority for overall implementation of the AP-BMP, must report on the implementation of the BMP to the Minister of Environmental Affairs.

The DEA representatives at the meeting stated that DEA wants to work collaboratively with the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) and had worked through the DAFF processes since 2006 when bird biologist from the then Marine and Coastal Management (MCM) requested the Small Pelagic Scientific Working Group to consider implementing island closures. However, DEA was concerned that cooperation has been a problem in relation to island closure work conducted through the Pelagic Scientific Working Group (SWG-PEL), which is a DAFF group that advises its relevant Chief Director. DEA representatives wished the process stipulated in the AP-BMP to be followed and noted that none of the government authorities having a mandate for penguin conservation had membership status on the SWG-PEL. The meeting noted that the Island Closures Task Team, which formerly provided some kind of representation for conservation authorities, had been disbanded by DAFF. DEA attendees also expressed concern at the large decreases of penguins that had taken place off western South Africa since 2006.

The workshop noted that DAFF and DEA have overlapping mandates in relation to penguin conservation and fishing and that it was essential for the two Departments to work together on these common interests. While there is interaction between scientists from the two Departments and some meetings at the Chief Director level have taken place, there is clearly a need to improve communication and cooperation, with mutual respect for the mandates and priorities of each department. The non-governmental workshop participants requested that DEA and DAFF meet regularly to improve upon the existing relationship and develop procedures for constructive collaboration, which would assist in resolving the island closures debates.

3. Recommendations of the 2014 International review panel

a. Discussion on the question(s) to be answered by the study

Various interpretations of the question were put forward, which are useful to consider:

- Is fishing around islands detrimental to penguins?
- Is restriction of fishing around islands beneficial to penguins?
- How best can island closures contribute to achieving the goals of the AP-BMP?

Wording from the International Panel's 2014 report was used as a baseline and modified after discussion and was phrased as:

What is the current impact of fishing in the vicinity of penguin breeding colonies on penguin populations? For practical purposes the initial focus of analyses of the island closures experiment will be on the agreed islands.

The workshop agreed that this is the fundamental question being addressed by the island closures study. It was also agreed that the details of how to answer this question, which would include further consideration of the terms "impact of fishing" and "in the vicinity of", would be done within the context of addressing the 2014 International Panel's recommendations.

b. Summary of the International Panel's recommendations and interpretation

The Chair presented his summary of the International Panel's report (Annex 1). Participants agreed this was a fair summary and agreed for the remainder of the meeting to focus the discussions on the "Research Recommendations" although noting that many of the more general "Recommendations and Conclusions" were important and would need to be considered in parallel to the more targeted research recommendations. DEA representatives noted that the design of an experiment that matched the biology of penguins would need further discussion.

c. Relative priority of recommendations

The relative priorities of recommendations as given by the Panel were unchanged. It was agreed that the low and medium priority recommendations A5-8 could be shelved for now, with the exceptions of parts of A5 and A7. Part of A5 (the economic study) is currently underway but it was noted that there are other aspects of this recommendation that were worth pursuing (e.g. multi-criteria decision analysis, development of additional data driven approaches). Recommendation A7 (estimates of local fish biomass) is being addressed on both the west coast (by DAFF) and the east coast (by Alistair McInnes and Lorien Pichegru). The only analyses so far presented to the Pelagic

Working Group have been for the west coast surveys. The workshop welcomes the east coast small scale survey work and encourages that it is continued. It was noted that analyses similar to those done for the west coast would be useful for the east coast results in order to evaluate the extent to which they provide a more precise and accurate estimates of local biomass.

Recommendation A4: Relates to the AP-BMP and progress is being made towards the implementation of this plan.

Recommendation A3: Substantial progress has been made but more work can/should be done. . The workshop agreed that addressing this recommendation was a high priority but not for immediate follow-up.

It was agreed that Recommendations A1 and A2 are inter-linked and need to be addressed simultaneously. Richard Sherley reported, in relation to A2, that he has done some very simple models thus far but these could be improved upon. The simulation studies recommended under A1 will lead into the power analysis and there are plans to start on this recommendation.

The workshop discussed what need to be done next, taking into account i) that DAFF is hoping for reliable scientific advice to inform the decision that needs to be made by the end of the year on extending the island closure experiment; and ii) the value of having made good progress in time to report to the 2015 International Panel meeting in December.

The following two questions were discussed:

- d. How should each recommendation be addressed, starting with those of highest priority and moving down as time permits;**
- e. What process should be followed to address the recommendations (different processes may apply to different recommendations) and possible timelines.**

The Chair noted that the previous approach of the two groups working independently and performing different analyses (answering different questions) clearly had not worked thus far, and should be avoided in future if possible. It was proposed that a smaller, focussed technical team, including members of both of the currently independent groups, be assembled to discuss the details of how each recommendation should be addressed. There was general support for this concept. It was also proposed that there be an independent chair to oversee the group. Kevern Cochrane was suggested as a candidate.

The names of several candidates for the technical team were put forward at the meeting including: Doug Butterworth, Richard Sherley, Henning Winker and Mike Bergh. Further suggestions for participation should be sent to Janet Coetzee, who will pass those on to the appointed Chair.

DAFF confirmed that in the absence of a recommendation by December the current closure regime would remain in place, as recommended by the international review panel in 2014, but it is hoped that some guidance can be provided by the task group before December 2015.

