



Wild Water, Natural Assets.

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Sardine season in KwaZulu-Natal: the ***Greatest Shoal on Earth***, a climactic gathering of the oceans life forms that are the very essence of the bounty our seas can provide. If we look after it...

I am not a marine expert, and much of what happens off our shores, remains a mystery for so many of us and accordingly something we do not spend much time on. Out of sight and out of mind.

But our oceans are being abused. The so-called Blue Economy, our salvation, is being raped by foreign vessels and foreign fossil fuel companies under our very noses under the auspices of Operation Phakisa.

In a recent article by Tony Carnie, we learned that our very own SASOL “has abandoned a controversial gas-drilling venture on the doorstep of the Bazaruto tropical island paradise in Mozambique after a massive public backlash and adverse environmental impact studies.”

15 years ago, the SA giant was awarded concessions and drilled two wells, which turned out to have poor gas deposits. SASOL then turned their ambitions to the shallower coastal waters directly next to the Bazaruto (Marine) National Park.

SASOL claims sustainability is integral to how they conduct business, underpinned by its commitment to compliance with all environmental legislation and undertaking any exploration activity in an environmentally responsible manner. These are empty words. Whose sustainability?

It is almost as if we are not in the midst of a global pandemic and the climax of a looming climate crisis. Humans, our consumptive patterns and our complete disregard for the fragility of this finite planet have nothing to do with this imbalance and it is entirely someone else's fault. Governments of the world (including our own), together with the increasingly obsolete and redundant fossil fuel industry is hell-bent on "business as usual".

Off our own shores, SLR Consulting and the TOTAL "Brulpadda" extension for South Coastline Block 11/12 have put out a proposal to drill 11 more exploration wells at sea between Cape St Francis and Mossel Bay. This is, if I recall my Grade 12 Geography, where the cold Benguela and warm Agulhas currents meet: an ecotone. This area is fundamental to the marine biodiversity of our coastline. There is a marine protected area just south of the prospecting block.

This is the same crowd that currently drives the process of exploration for Rhino Oil and Gas, amongst others, across millions of hectares of farmland in KZN, Free State, Eastern Cape, Mpumalanga, Gauteng and Limpopo. In fact, one would struggle to find a province or country in southern Africa where this consultancy and their cohorts are not attempting to pave the way for fossil fuel exploitation that South Africa and its neighbours can ill afford. In the national interest! Please, spare me!



WWF brought out a fascinating [Facts and Futures Report](#) on the state of South Africa's water in 2016. It is a comprehensive 100 page document that is well written and easily understood.

We learn that more than 44% of South Africa's rivers are now critically threatened by human created problems that require human-centred solutions at a local scale.

In South Africa, we have a penchant for committees and commissions. Why are we not acting like water is a key national asset? Why are projects such as the 19th Strategic Integrated Project, known as 'SIP 19: Ecological Infrastructure for Water Security', not wholeheartedly supported and recognised as a key part of the plan, not just by our Water departments, but by all departments?

Why is it that a Strategic Environmental Assessment is conducted for the Karoo Basin gas exploration and not for one of South Africa's most critical water assets the Uthukela, Umzimvubu and Umgeni water catchments?

Ban Ki-Moon, Former UN Secretary General once remarked, "We are the first generation that can end poverty – and the last generation to tackle climate change before it is too late."

Why are we spending millions in water treatment and ignoring the plight of wetlands and water catchments, when nearly 80% of people in some of these catchments are unemployed and do not have access to clean water? In 2006/7, at the Voëlvlei Dam (one of the supply dams for Cape Town), the purification plant had an output of 120 000 m³ per day. At the time, treating algal blooms with chemicals cost R4.7 million per year. An investment in job creation in the wetlands of this catchment could have substantially reduced or prevented this cost altogether. That is 100 full-time jobs of R4000 per month, injecting R400000 per month directly into a local economy and generating multipliers that would stimulate other opportunities, not to mention educating and increasing awareness of ecosystems.

Are we so fixated on creating jobs through government procurement that we ignore our own basic needs and imperil our water sources?

Why are we fighting our own government for the right to protect and preserve our own resources? Why did the Xolobeni community in Eastern Cape have to take the Minister of Mineral Resources to court to preserve their traditional beliefs and care for the land? It is not different here than in other countries. In the USA, the Dakota Access Pipeline has just been ordered to shut down after indigenous people fought for years for their right to freedom from potential harm, blatantly ignored by the Trump regime. Why are civil servants seldom neither civil nor servants?

The Constitutional Court judgement in *Daniels v Scribante & Another*^[1] opens with the plaintive words from an old man Petros Nkosi... "The land, our purpose is the land; that is what we must achieve. The land is our whole lives: we plough it for food; we build our houses from the soil; we live on it; and we are buried in it....in everything we do, we must remember that there is only one aim and one solution and that is the land, the soil, our world."

Clean air, clean water, clean soil and the protection of terrestrial and marine life, our ability to earn a living off it. Is it too much to ask of our elected officials?

Note: the Sasol/ENI application to drill off KZN is in the appeal phase. But watch the space...



This story forms part of Roving Reporters [The Future We Want](#) series. It was also covered in the Sunday Tribune, 19 July 2020, [download the pdf here](#).

Oil rig image by Kristina Kasputienė and Plastic Pollution image by Sergei Tokmakov, both Pixabay