

EDITORIAL

Life is a medley of certainty and uncertainty, which is partly what makes it worth living. Not so fishing, where there is only uncertainty.

Yes you can count on getting your keel wet if you fish from a boat, or your line snagged on a rock if you fish from land. But other than that there is precious little you can count on these days when you have to cast your net out into the blue.

Whereas a bit of uncertainty is all part of the fun when you're fly-fishing with some crinkle paper you glued together in the garage, it is not fun for businesses and communities relying on their catch to survive. Therein lies the key difference between commercial and recreational fishing: while both embrace uncertainty, recreationalists see it as primarily a blessing and the commercials as a curse.

The uncertainty principle is a key theme connecting most if not all of the stories in this issue of *Fishing Industry News Southern Africa*. On the one hand we report on the massively politicised deliberations over small-scale fishing and long term rights in the West Coast Rock Lobster fishery, which converged in Hout Bay in mid-September. Uncertainty over implementation of the small-scale policy and related quota allocations is one uncertainty too many for struggling coastal communities who would like some long-awaited respite from hand-to-mouth living (turn to Page 6).

Then there is the uncertainty faced by factory workers who cannot be sure their employer will produce fish to pack; by small-to-medium sized businesses which cannot be sure of loan financing; by government officials who cannot guarantee they will not be redeployed to outer Guptastan should they make the wrong policy decision.

It all adds up to a rather bleak period in the commercial sector which must be wishing for times of smooth sailing so they can just get on with the art of staying in business. Even retail outlets like The Fishing Specialist, usually a bedrock of certainty due to the brisk trade in lures and sinkers, are saying nothing is certain these days in the once booming recreational market (Page 27).

Fortunately even failure is uncertain in these unpredictable times. Elsewhere in this issue we report on an innovative by-catch solution on the famous *Desert Diamond* (page 12). As a wise fisherman once said: he who thinks he probably won't catch a fish, probably won't go fishing.

And if you are a fisherman in KZN or the Eastern Cape there is a strong likelihood that your days are numbered. Government has given the go-ahead for offshore seismic surveys. We covered this in great depth in the last issue but we weren't aware that there has been a change in the Mineral and Petroleum Resources Development Act (MPRDA) which has given seismic surveys approval without the usual environmental regulation mineral explorations usually have to go under.

Environmental lobbyists, groundWork and South Durban Community Environmental Alliance, are calling for an immediate halt to the looting of the seas and to all oil and gas exploration, echoed by one Durban fisherman who sums it up: "The presence of offshore oil and gas all over the world has always had a bad impact on marine life".

Uncertainty is a fact of life and will always be with us so long as there are fish in the sea, or whatever else is in there once they're gone.

EDITOR