

# Proposed aquaculture project

# TOURISM WARY

Mossel Bay Tourism is concerned about the impact of Irvine & Johnson's proposed aquaculture project - which could see 36 fish cages anchored in an area of 200 hectares of the Bay, 2.5 km off the Little Brak River Mouth.

The proposed cages would be between 70 and 100 metres in length and, although they're expected to be 15 metres deep, would protrude 1.2 metres above the ocean's surface.

Chairman of Mossel Bay Tourism, Louis Cook, has expressed his dissatisfaction with the public participation process which has been followed thus far - beginning with the fact that the Draft Basic Assessment Report was presented to a stakeholder meeting in Cape Town and not in Mossel Bay, where, he said, "the real stakeholders can be found."

"The community and its institutions were thus not given a proper opportunity to provide their input - and although they aren't all scientists or scien-

tific bodies, it's clear that there are many in Mossel Bay who are genuinely concerned about the potential damage to our environment.

"It should never be forgotten that local people are very aware of local conditions," he said.

"If, for instance, you consider the contention that was put forward at that meeting that the proposed fish cages will have minimal impact on whale movement in the Bay: one wonders which scientists actually took part in this study - because the area where the cages are to be anchored is a prime viewing spot where many tourists enjoy excellent sightings in whale season.

"Also, the fact that the company intends using 'Acoustic Deterrent De-

## Tourism wary

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vices' (ADDs) to keep whales and sharks away is extremely alarming because our experience has shown that the whale population drops when large scale fishing - with its accompanying noise from droning motors - takes place in the Bay.

"This has a direct impact on whale tourism - which is one reason why sardine boats which work here are prohibited from operating within two sea miles (about 4 km) of the coast during whale season.

"Mossel Bay Tourism has been

working very hard for many years to increase visitor numbers during the winter period - which is when whale season occurs - and whale tourism is a prime tool in our arsenal in this campaign.

"In Hermanus during whale season, Walker Bay becomes a no-go area for all boats except licensed whale-watching charter vessels - exactly because of boats effect the animals and therefore impact on whale tourism.

"In Mossel Bay, we can therefore reasonably expect that the use of ADDs will combine with the increased

boat activity (which the fish farm will require for feeding, harvesting, chemical spraying and so on) to negatively impact on our whales and dolphins - and therefore on whale tourism," he said.

Mr Cook also mentioned the negative impact that fish cages could have on the visual environment. "As it is you can see fixed buoys which lie as much as 4 km offshore with the naked eye - I can only imagine what 200 hectares of cages that stick 1.2 metres above the water would have on one's views of the Bay," said.

Mossel Bay has recently attracted international attention as a prime area for great white sharks - largely as a result of a National Geographic documentary that was researched and filmed by local scientist Ryan Johnson and his South African Marine Predators Laboratory (SAM-PLA).

"Gansbaai may be more famous as a white shark diving destination, but Ryan showed that because we have only one operator in Mossel Bay, the marine environment here is less impacted upon and therefore more conducive to the study

of the species and its natural habits," said Mr Cook.

"But shark diving is important to us in Mossel Bay, and we are of the opinion that the fish farm could change conditions sufficiently to affect both shark tourism and shark research.

"Careful attention should therefore be paid to the opinion of concerned citizens and local experts - many of whom have spent years studying the environment and the inhabitants of this Bay," he said.

Mr Cook emphasised, however, that his board wasn't in principal entirely opposed to the es-

tablishment of the fish farm.

"The impact that it could have on tourism will depend largely on the impact that it could have on other spheres of life in Mossel Bay, he said. "If that is minimal, then it shouldn't have a major impact on tourism - and vice versa - but this is a question that can only be answered once all parties have been given a proper hearing.

"In its present form, though, we are not satisfied that it will, indeed, have a minimal impact on life - and therefore on tourism - in the Bay."