



forestry, fisheries & the environment

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

(For written reply)

QUESTION NO. 3637 {NW4825E}

INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO. 41 of 2023

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Mr D W Bryant (DA) to ask the Minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment:

Whether any specific testing has been carried out to determine the impact on sea life of the sonic exploration testing that is taking place off the coast of Hermanus, taking into consideration the unique status of the area as a breeding space for whales; if not, why not; if so, what are the relevant details?

3637. THE MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT REPLIES:

“Sonic exploration testing” could refer to exploratory sonic drilling (drilling using high frequency vibration), or it could refer to testing using sound waves, such as seismic surveys (or some other type of geophysical survey using sound waves). It is assumed that the query is with regard to the seismic surveys, although the Department is not aware of any active seismic surveys currently being employed off the coast of Hermanus.

Seismic surveys, which are conducted to locate and explore oil and gas reserves, have been conducted in South Africa since the 1980's. Controversy around seismic surveys, which recently surfaced in South Africa, appears to be related to concern about risk of upstream petroleum activities to marine ecosystems, including concern about impacts of seismic exploration surveys on marine life and people's livelihoods, and/or concerns about continued fossil fuel extraction, from a climate change perspective.

Considerable research on the impacts of marine seismic surveys on marine life has been undertaken globally. Such research has informed development and improvement of mitigation measures for impacts or potential impacts on marine life.

In the consideration of appeals that are submitted against the decisions taken by the Department of Mineral Resources and Energy to grant authorisation to applicants for prospecting activities in the ocean, the impact of the seismic noise on marine fauna is carefully scrutinised and assessed based on the scientific reports that are provided in the appeal record. The specialist studies found that the impacts on marine fauna, including whales, dolphins and seals to be of low significance after the implementation of the mitigation measures. Following the assessment of the impact on whales, the following mitigation measures are identified to avoid manage and mitigate identified impacts on marine fauna:

- Globally used seismic survey mitigation measures will be implemented during the undertaking of the survey. These include avoiding sensitive areas and seasonal periods for some marine fauna. Specifically, pre-planning the seismic survey taking into consideration the movement of migratory cetaceans (particularly baleen whales) from their southern feeding grounds into low latitude waters (June/July and late October/November), and their aggregation on the summer feeding grounds between St Helena Bay and Dassen Island from late October to late December and ensuring that migration paths are not blocked by seismic operations.
- Additional mitigation measures that are also in line with international best practice will be implemented to reduce any impacts on marine fauna to acceptable levels, such as "soft start" procedures, Marine Mammal Observer (MMO) and Passive Acoustic Monitoring (PAM). These will be managed and monitored.



MS B D CREECY, MP
MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES AND THE ENVIRONMENT
DATE: 16.11.2023