

Tsitsikamma, South Africa: Food security and livelihood threats to fishers bordering the Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Area

Ella-Kari Muhl

University of Cape Town, South Africa; mhlell004@myuct.ac.za

Key Messages

- No-take marine protected areas (MPAs) are promoted as a long-term conservation strategy. However, in areas of low economic opportunity and limited alternative livelihoods or transitional support, no-take MPAs threaten the food security and cultural practices of fishers.
- A lack of communication between the regulating authority (SANParks) and the fishers has increased conflict in the Tsitsikamma area and endangered community member's food security and livelihoods.
- Participatory monitoring, with formalised consultation with community members may reduce conflict and strengthen conservation goals.

Community Introduction

Tsitsikamma translates to “place of much water” in Khoisan (the local indigenous language). This area, interlinking the Western and Eastern Cape Provinces of South Africa, includes the Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Area (MPA), which spans 80km and affects the food security, cultural practices and livelihoods of eight communities, including Thornham, Stormsrivier, Nompumelelo and Sanddrif (Figure 1). The Tsitsikamma National Park (TNP) was created in 1964, following the IUCN's conference of 1962. The Tsitsikamma (TNP) MPA is the oldest MPA in South Africa.

At first, fishing was permitted in certain areas of the Tsitsikamma MPA, with a permit. This was later restricted in 1976 to only one area, before ultimately becoming a “no-take” MPA in 2000.

Since 2000, local fishers have been barred from harvesting marine resources despite historically having had access to the ocean and coastal resources. These communities have been reliant on mixed livelihoods, including fishing, for generations. There are currently 5,434 people residing in the 4 communities who, due to low

economic opportunity, are reliant on fishing for food security and consider it part of their cultural practice.



Figure 1: The location of the TNP MPA relevant to the local communities

Conservation and Livelihood Challenges

Historically, the South African government enforced racially exclusionary rules for accessing the coast and its resources, leading to the marginalization of rural coastal communities (especially in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu-



Natal), which were dependent on coastal resources for their food security and livelihoods^{1,2}. In the wake of Apartheid, South Africa's National Parks have come under increased pressure to reconcile the wealth of natural resources to the social and economic needs of the previously oppressed black rural communities³.

The Threat of the “no-take” MPA

With the abolition of Apartheid and introduction of democracy, it was hoped that the right of small-scale and subsistence fishers would be restored in accordance with their culture and tradition⁴.

The legislative change to a “no take” MPA in 2000 under the Marine Living Resource Act 18 of 1998 was shown to affect not only food security for the fishers and their families but also their cultural identity and heritage³. The Thornham, Stormsrivier, Nompumelelo and Sanddrif communities have been reliant on fishing as a form of food security. With the loss of access to fish, there has been a reported decline in health and increase in crime⁵.

Fishers state that in addition, their well-being has been affected by the closure of the MPA, as fishing is part of their identity³. The current top-down governmental conservation program, which introduced a no-take MPA as a form of conservation to promote sustainability and biodiversity, was implemented without consultation with the community, and subsequently has elevated conflict between community members and the regulating authority.

Food Security, Customary Rights and Livelihood impacts

With no alternative livelihood provided, local village economies remain limited with few economic opportunities available (Figure 2). Local household economies are poor and under severe stress. Only 52.6% of households met the financial requirements for food security in 2016. This increases fisher's dependence on marine resources as a supplementary food source. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) housing built by the South African

government in 2001 to create Nompumelelo village added 480 households to the area placing additional pressure on resources⁶. The timing of the completion of RDP housing coincided with the delineation of a no-take MPA, thus increased competition for work, and placed strain on local amenities, with already limited public services and health care.

The change in coastal access and legislation has had a negative effect on the community with a loss of livelihoods, fishing and recreational activity. The community describe themselves as being “born on the rocks (coast)”, claiming original ancestry from the indigenous Khoi-san people, indicating a consideration of the coast as a part of their culture and traditions^{3,7}. Many residents in Tsitsikamma have also historically relied on coastal forests for a range of amenities, such as medicinal plants, honey and woods for fuels and building materials, which they are also denied access to.

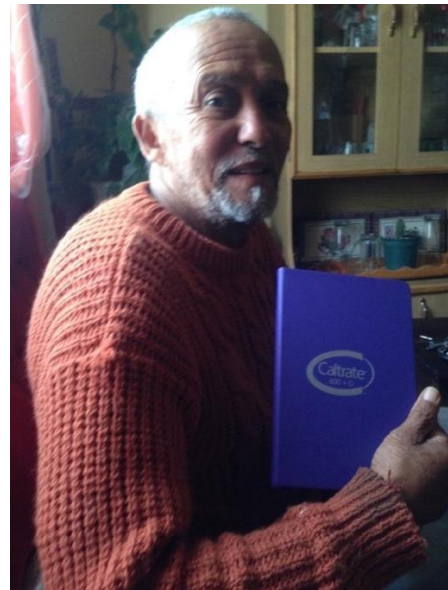


Figure 2: A former fisher, no longer allowed to access the coast, writes poetry about the sea now.

The lack of recognition as stakeholders and exclusion from the coastline has illustrated that unless social and ecological factors are considered with the design of the MPA, illegal fishing and conflict will continue between SANParks (South African National Parks) and the local communities.

Community Initiative

In 1994, the community created the Tsitsikamma Angling Forum (TAF) to represent local fishers who wanted access to the coast. The TAF have petitioned against the TNP formally in 1976, 1995, 2006, and 2015. They have also worked with a task team comprised of the Kou Kamma municipality and SANParks to reopen the TNP in 2006, 2014 and 2015. The TAF actively protested SANParks in 2007, when 70 members fished illegally in the Tsitsikamma MPA.

The community has become increasingly mobilized and in 2015, following workshops between the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA), Oceans and Coasts Branch, the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF), SANParks, the local municipality (Kou Kamma) and representatives from TAF, the decision was made to open specific areas within the MPA for fishing with restrictions. The plan to reopen certain areas was approved in December 2015 through promulgation of a government gazette but was then blocked by the Friends of the Tsitsikamma, an association that obtained a court interdict against SANParks, DEA and TAF in January 2016⁸.

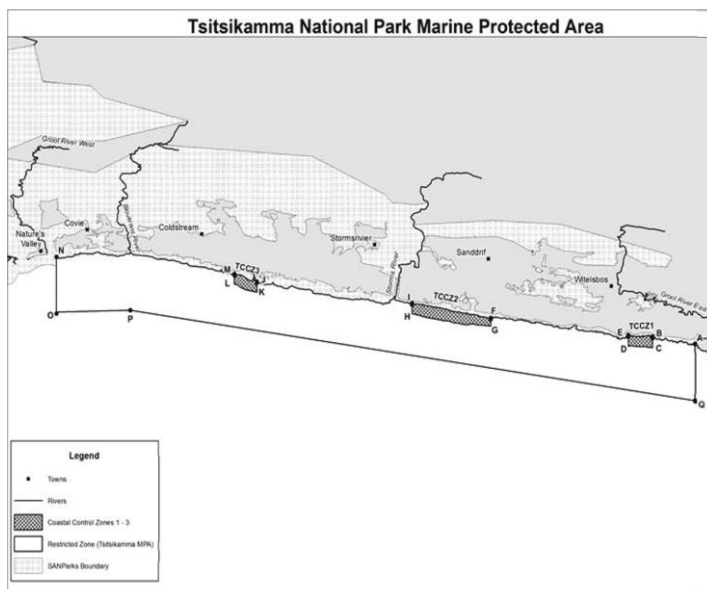


Figure 3: Map depicting the three coastal control zones within the Tsitsikamma MPA

Legal Recognition of Historically Disadvantaged Residents

Following the closure in January 2016, later in December 2016, the TNP MPA was rezoned in the new government gazette 40511⁹ to allow 3 controlled fishing areas to be opened for community members to fish (Figure 3). However, the MPA re-opening process has been questioned as consultation was not carried out with local community members and was poorly conceptualized with little practical changes for community member's food security or livelihoods.

At present, community members are required to purchase a permit. However, older fishers and minors are either prohibited or unable to fish under the new gazette ruling, halting the multi-generational transfer of knowledge. This prevents the oral traditions and teachings of the older generation from passing down to the present. The subsequent absence of SANParks at the controlled zones prevents fishers from communicating effectively with rangers and leads to miscommunication and further resentment towards SANParks.

These challenges and lack of capacity within SANParks reveals the vulnerability of the Tsitsikamma fishing communities and the need to incorporate local ecological knowledge (LEK) and community members into partnerships with researchers and authorities to better manage MPAs.

Practical Outcomes

The Tsitsikamma community have issues of food security and a lack of economic opportunities or alternative livelihoods (Figure 4). The creation of the no-take MPA has disrupted a reliance on fish as a contribution to food and cultural practices³. The community members have identified 5 solutions that would be the most beneficial towards restoring trust between community fishers and SANParks (Figure 5).

(1) Collaboration

Community members and government officials need to work together through a duty of care and environmental stewardship for the MPA, along with an understanding that fishers would protect the resource, as long as their cultural rights were preserved and they are allowed access to harvest medicinal plants, fish and other forest items sustainably.

(2) Transgenerational access to the MPA

Emphasis was placed on elders and minors being able to access the coast for fishing and cultural practices. The older generation hold the knowledge and cultural practices from their ancestors. They are instrumental in teaching the youth the importance of using natural resources sustainably and teaching them about the species of fish, the types of medicinal plants and how to harvest them in an environmentally friendly manner.



Figure 4: The Stormsrivier mouth which is located centrally in the park and would be accessible to fishers, however is reserved for tourists.

(3) Education

The fishers expressed interest in environmental education workshops for both adults and children, as almost a whole generation has not had access to the sea and there has been a loss of knowledge. Fishers listed workshops as being beneficial so that they could better understand why certain species were not allowed to be caught. This would also help to clarify rules as, at present, the new government gazette is unclear and some fishers are unsure of why certain rules are in place.

(4) Communication

To empower fishers and effectively promote collaboration, communication is necessary between DEA, SANParks, working groups made of interested parties, scientists and elected community members. Increasing the capacity of and empowering local fishers to participate in decision-making processes leads to practical, real solutions that strengthen ownership and promote care of the resource.

(5) Acknowledgement of Customary rights and Access rights

In order to improve management, increased understanding of government officials of the fishers' customary rights and importance of access will foster respect and promote conservation, as well as help reduce tensions and conflict between the two parties.

Future concerns

Dialogue between the community and the regulating authorities is improving; however, policy makers need to discuss proposed changes before implementing them, for there to be a successful conservation impact. Top-down processes of government control only serve to further marginalise the community and promote resentment. A working partnership is necessary to establish trust and understanding with an emphasis on LEK combined with scientific expertise for better policy and practice.



Figure 5: The Thornham Focus Group members with their list of practical outcomes

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Correspondence:

Community Conservation Research Network

Saint Mary's University

Halifax, Nova Scotia

B3H 3C3 Canada

Phone: 902.420.5003

E-mail: ccrn@smu.ca

