

FOSAF NORTHERN REGION CHAIRMAN'S REPORT FOR THE 2022 PERIOD

1. Finances

Our Northern Region bank balances are in a healthy state as at March 2023 with R38K in the current account and R50K in the savings and investment accounts. This is mainly due to the continued and generous sponsorship by Millstream, about R30K from membership rebates, the sale for R10K of Flyfishing Publications cc and about R5K donated when the Machadodorp Glenshee club was closed. At the same time the stipends paid to office bearers were reduced.

2. Membership.

Both the DFFA and TFFC will again participate in the club membership scheme where at least 50% of the club membership must join to qualify. The members then pay R170,00 instead of the R360,00 annual fee. It is expected that in 2023 this will bring in about R41K to national funds.

One of the problems confronting us is the lack of support from the younger flyfishers who are not replacing the older members who are either giving up the sport due to age or passing away. Tough economic conditions and emigration is also taking its toll while priority of the younger set tends to be to clubs, syndicates and the very active competitive flyfishing organisations.

3. NR Committee

The committee comprises Chris Williams (chairman), Andy Lawler (vice chairman) Peter Arderne (secretary), Vicki Arderne (bookkeeper) Jade dos Santos, Jonty Scott, Anthea Piater and Martin Rudman. Mike Biccard and Warren van Tonder resigned during the year and very sadly Geoff Taylor who was such a stalwart member of the committee passed away in early 2022.

4. Northern Region Projects

a. Books

Although sales of books to angling stores virtually ceased a fair number are supplied to FOSAF members at the discounted prices. Such sales accrue to the National account.

b. Communications: Website, Facebook & Twitter

The upgraded website which was launched in January 2022 has been well received and the images on the home page were replaced in late 2022 to give the site a fresh look. This exercise will be repeated in 2023. We rely largely on links provided via Facebook and Twitter to publicise content on the site.

c. Yellowfish Working Group

The YWG relies almost solely on the occasional newsletter sent to about 360 persons during the year. There has not been an annual conference since 2015 due to lack of funds

and lack of support from the HODs of the provincial conservation bodies. We are actively seeking a new chairman with the requisite scientific knowledge who will take over responsibility and organise a virtual conference, the cost of which our region can possibly support.

We also support the annual donations made by National since 2020 to the “Save the Sandfish” project. In addition, we suggest that National look closely at the proposal that one or two yellowfish flyfishing stillwaters be developed in the Cederberg.

d. The Vaal River Crisis.

SAVE The Vaal Environment is progressing positively on its court action. This concerns mid Vaal sewage pollution accountability by the relevant municipalities, by local/provincial/national government departments and by their respective heads. A week ago, the High Court accepted an order of court and an affidavit is being issued. This is the court approval for progressive action by SAVE against the municipality and government on grounds of the latter’s dereliction of duty by non-performance, misappropriation of funds and by their allowing waste water treatment works and sewage pump stations to degrade into a state of breakdown and disrepair. As with all South African law cases at present this legal matter is long-drawn out but all things point a SAVE victory.

A major component of this abomination is the authorities’ nationwide disregard for human, animal and environmental rights. Direct results of this wilful neglect include cholera and an alarming loss of quality and quantity of our inland fish, insect life and precious water. Smallmouth and largemouth yellowfish populations are dwindling. As a result, middle Vaal aquatic insect life requiring moderate/clean water quality has in recent years led to the disappearance of several mayfly species, stoneflies and other yellowfish dietary staple food. Regular independent water testing in the area shows E. coli counts 180 times the safe WHO maximum limit. Despite our and others’ requests over the years, cholera counts are still not monitored by any government or state utility water quality testing.

Looking at the big picture, concerned flyfishers can join FOSAF and help us represent the flyfishing community to protect our fish and water. On the individual level, in polluted rivers and dams flyfishers should always wear waders and avoid any direct contact with such water. Practices such as wetting one’s knots with saliva should be avoided. Apart from cholera there are a host of other highly-contagious gastrointestinal disorders which are readily transmitted via river/dam, raw sewage and untreated waste water. All sectors of the community including flyfishers and tourism should work together at all levels to combat this criminal neglect/behaviour. A little bit goes a long way when good people get involved on a proactive basis.

The invasive plague of water hyacinth, water lettuce and salvinia continues in our inland local rivers and dams. Several interest groups, ourselves included, continue to work with Rhodes University and Rand Water Environmental

Services with their weevil biological programme on these plants' eradication. Unfortunately this is a seasonal cycle and is therefore an annual ongoing process.

A positive factor this year is flyfishers' growing awareness of the reality and concern as regards the above.

e. Mpumalanga mining crisis.

Opposition to mining, especially in the Trout Triangle is led by a consortium comprising mainly the Greater Lakenvlei Protected Environment (GLPE), but well supported by environmental NGOs and some of the flyfishing destinations. Although considerable success has been achieved in opposing applications for prospecting/mining in the last 6 years the WPB Colliery at the head of the Elands River continues to cause extreme damage to the environment. Despite clear evidence of criminal offences neither the DMRE nor the DWS appear to be prepared to take action. The mine will now apply for a renewal of its water use licence which the consortium will strongly oppose, and if need be appeal. FOSAF NR has offered assistance with legal costs.

The GLPE which is 14 000 ha in extent is due to be expanded by a further 7 000 ha this year and will then include at least 10 important flyfishing destinations including Millstream plus smaller syndicates. This extension should in theory add protection against untoward developments such as mining.

f. The Northern Trout Association.

This organisation which is strongly supported by Northern Region was launched as the Mpumalanga Trout Association in 2015. More recently it incorporated the provinces of KZN, Free State, Gauteng and Limpopo and together with FOSAF is a member of Trout SA. Whereas FOSAF aims to represent the interest of all flyfishers the NTA is focused on the production of trout. Most of the funding for the mapping of the trout zone in 2015 was sourced from the then Mpumalanga Trout Association.

A major problem facing the members is that an annual permit is required for stocking trout in Mpumalanga, even in the area in which it was agreed with the provincial authorities that stocking trout may be permitted. Not only has the cost of these permits been increased significantly, but there have been a number of delays in the last two years in the approval of repeat permits which has damaged the hospitality industry. Both the NTA and FOSAF contend that in fact no permit should be required for stocking in an agreed trout area and this matter will be taken up with the Mpumalanga Tourism & Parks Agency once a ruling is handed down by the Concourt in the trout case.

g. Youth

Post-Covid recovery and unseasonably wet weather have hampered our efforts in getting flyfishing out there to our young generation this past season. Sewage pollution and the reality of cholera are added deterrents in the warm water inland regions. Several local clubs and groups in the interim have been conducting fly tying and fly casting programmes for children and newcomers. We hope to take this cause up again during the coming year as conditions permit.

Chris Williams.
Northern Region Chairman.