



# agriculture, forestry & fisheries

Department:  
Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

**28 May 2019**

**For immediate release**

### ***RESPONSE TO AN ARTICLE ON SUNDAY TIMES - TUNA SECTOR TRIES TO CLARIFY MURKY WATERS***

The Department is aware of an article, published in the Sunday Times of 26 May 2019, *Tuna Sector Tries to Clarify Murky Waters*. The article contains a number of statements that are not factual, some plainly wrong, some badly researched and some connecting processes that have nothing to do with each other in an attempt to string together a publishable story.

Chapter 1 of the Code of Ethics and Conduct for South African Print and Online Media is clear on the obligations when gathering and reporting of news: The journalist needs to take care to report news truthfully, accurately and fairly; present news in context and in a balanced manner, without any intentional or negligent departure from the facts whether by distortion, exaggeration or misrepresentation, material omissions, or summarization; present only what may reasonably be true as fact; opinions, allegations, rumours or suppositions shall be presented clearly as such; verify the accuracy of doubtful information, if practicable; if not, this shall be stated; state where a report is based on limited information, and supplement it once new information becomes available;

In publishing the article despite being given accurate, verifiable information (available on request) the Sunday Times has not adhered to these principles. The journalist relies on anonymous sources and does not attempt to balance the information provided to him by these sources with what the Department has provided him.

The headline of the article already implies to the reader that there are “murky” waters, insinuating that there are hidden agendas and that the Department is not transparent in the way it manages the tuna longline sector. “Tries to clarify” again implies that the Department somehow fails to explain what is going on. This headline in itself already reveals the

intention of the article: The writer has a pre-determined narrative despite acknowledging his own limited understanding of tuna fisheries. He is hell-bent to sell a “story” by creating the impression that something untoward is happening in tuna fisheries management, despite having been provided facts to the contrary.

A comprehensive response has been prepared for the attention of the press ombudsman, as a “right to reply” publication to the Sunday times. In this response the Department will show that most paragraphs in the Article contain violations of the Code of Ethics in the form of inaccurate reporting, distortion of facts, misrepresentation, omission of facts and unverifiable information by reliance on speculation and anonymous industry sources. Without pre-empting the comprehensive response-there are more than fifteen paragraphs in the article-the Department provides a few examples below. The writer talks about trawlers and relies on comments from the trawl industry. Any reasonable journalist would know that tuna is caught in South Africa by the Longline and Pole fishing vessels. The statements on foreign trawlers that fish illegally in South African Waters are false and only serve the narrative of the story, to link foreign fishing to illegal activity, which is then linked to the foreign vessels operating in the Longline fishery. The writer talks about a court case. This information is plainly false as there is no such court case against the Department by Tuna SA. The list on the violations of the Code of Ethics is long. The writer connects half-truths and selective information to spin a story that has very little to do with the facts. He does so despite being provided the correct information by the Department. His departure from the truth is negligent, with shocking levels of inaccuracy, summarization and little intent to balance rumours and speculation with verifiable information.

The story teller takes half-truths and sound-bites, knits them together for the purpose of a preconceived narrative that has very little to do with the facts provided to him by the Department:

1. The facts are verifiable, transparent and clear like the rich warm pelagic waters that harbour the tuna stocks targeted by the Large Pelagic Longline fishery.
2. South Africa has performed exemplary in terms of the vast majority of tuna Regional Fisheries Management Organisations’ requirements, something that is well known and widely acknowledged among Member States in all RFMOs.

By publishing this article despite its shortcomings the story teller and the Sunday times have violated the Code of Ethics. The Department therefore demands that the Newspaper retracts the article, issues an apology and grants the Department the right to reply as stipulated in

the Ethics Code under Chapter 1: “make amends for presenting inaccurate information or comment by publishing promptly and with appropriate prominence a retraction, correction, explanation or an apology;”.

If there is a need for a story, how about telling a good story of the vast improvements to our tuna fisheries management and conservation efforts over the last five years?

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