

MEDIA STATEMENT: INSPECTION ON THREE CHINESE VESSELS AT THE EAST LONDON PORT

Issued by DAFF, SANDF and SAMSA

23 MAY 2016

The Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries (DAFF) joined forces with the South African Navy to conduct sea patrol within the South African coastline; where a Fishery Control Officer was deployed on board the South African Navy vessel. The operation has resulted in capturing of three foreign vessels which are currently birthed at East London Port. The vessels arrived at the Port last night accompanied by the DAFF vessel Sarah Baartman and the SA Navy vessel SAS Drakensberg. A thorough inspection was done on all three vessels by all law enforcement agencies in East London; South African Police Services, SARS Customs, DHA Immigration, South African Maritime Safety Authority.

Around the Eastern Cape coastline, on 20 May 2016 just off Port Elizabeth the joint patrol spotted two Foreign Fishing Vessels from the Automated Identification System on board the Navy Vessel. We established that the vessels had gear on board and we verified that they had not applied to enter into our Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) and that created suspicion. The seas were rough which made it impossible for our inspectors to board the vessels. Our Fishery Control Officers instructed the vessels through radio communication to sail to East London Port but they did not cooperate.

DAFF's patrol vessel and SA NAVY Vessel had to increase speed in order to intercept the foreign fishing vessels which were speeding off, but managed to intercept them. The vessels stopped and they switched off their Engines. That continued and at about 02h00, on Sunday morning 22 May 2016, the foreign fishing vessels started their engines and within no time and with no communication with the Inspectors, they started steaming towards the east.

The two foreign vessels were followed throughout the early hours of the morning and they were intercepted again, and fortunately this time the weather had improved and the fisheries inspectors and the SA Navy officials boarded the foreign vessels. The Inspections were conducted, whereby fish and gear was found on both foreign vessels, both with no permits. The vessels were again instructed to sail to the nearest port which was East London.

Enroute to East London, another foreign fishing vessel was spotted crossing in between the fleet going in a different direction, and the inspectors launched to go and conduct the inspection on board this vessel. This vessel did not have any permit and was also instructed to go to East London Port. All the law enforcement agencies were informed and activated to participate in the thorough inspection of the Vessel on their arrival to the Port.

The foreign fishing vessels were found to have the following tons of fish on board:

- Fu Yuan Yu 7880 about 340 tons of squid with 36 crew
- Fu Yang Yu 7881 1 about 60 tons of squid with 34 crew
- Run Da 617 about 200 tons of squid and other species of fish with 26 crew

Currently all the Fish holding cabins have been sealed off as required by investigation standards. As part of further investigations of the vessels, all fish will be taken out of the vessels for further identification, counting and weighing.

POSSIBLE CHARGES

- Possession of Gear on board without a Gear Permit.
- Not complying with the Lawful Instruction from the Fishery Control Officer.
- Possible infringements in terms the International Conservation and Management Measures inside or outside South African waters.
- Further investigations may lead to further charges.

“The capturing of these vessels indicates our seriousness as a country to protect our territorial and exclusive economic zone. We cannot tolerate the plundering of our Marine Resources, which are a source of food security and play a huge role in realising our goals in Operation Phakisa. We are also looking into the sudden influx of these vessels in our waters “said Minister Zokwana.

“The South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA) will be conducting a survey of the vessels today. The inspection will consider crew safety, pollution threat, vessel safety standards and all related matters in terms of International conventions as well as South African Maritime Law” said Mr Tobela Gqabu, Principal Officer, Centre for Fishing in East London.

“The mandate of the South African National Defence Force and in particular the South African Navy is to ensure that we protect the maritime routes and the resources of our country as we protect the territorial integrity of the Republic” said Siphiwe Dlamini, Head of Communication South African Defence Force.

DAFF and SAPS are busy with registration of the docket, after which it will be handed over to the National Prosecuting Authority (NPA).

For More information contact:-

Ms Bomikazi Molapo

Ministers Spokesperson (DAFF)

079 698 2114

Bomikazim@daff.gov.za

Mr Sphiwe Dlamini

South African Defence Force

Head of Communication

083 645 4294

Sphiwe.dlamini@dod.mil.za

Mr Sicelo Fayo

SAMSA

Content Manager

082 384 0945

Sfayo@samsa.org.za