

# Fine kettle of fish for global meeting

**BOBBY JORDAN**

FOR years, two South African government officials were sufficient to report back from the international Antarctic conference in Australia.

This year, however, the country is sending six officials — despite massive budget cuts and a decline in South Africa's Antarctic fishing industry.

A tussle over control of marine resources between two rival government departments has resulted in each sending its own delegation to Hobart for the conference, running from October 11 to November 5.

Neither the Department of Environmental Affairs nor the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries is saying how much the trip will cost the South African taxpayer. Both claim their presence is justified — but they can't agree who is in charge.

The embarrassing spat is part of an ongoing tug-of-war between the DAFF and DEA which is paralysing coastal management. This week the Sunday Times established that:

- The standoff has caused confusion at the conference in Hobart, which now has nine South African representatives — six from the government and three from private industry;

- The split has divided South Africa's fisheries research fleet, with DAFF managing the vessels but DEA retaining some of the vessels' budget — resulting in a logistical nightmare;

- The split has led to the collapse of critical fisheries regulation whereby, industry sources say, there are still no figures for 2010 or 2009 on how many fish may be caught;

- The funding row between the two departments spilt over into an agriculture portfolio committee meeting last month when the DAFF claimed it was unable to do its job properly

cause of missing millions still controlled by DEA; and

- The DAFF this week confirmed the country's three main research vessels collectively spent only 223 days at sea over the past six months — out of 540 "sea days".

At the heart of the problem is the dismantling of the former Department of Marine and Coastal Management. About 350 staff members, including its former head, Monde Mayekiso, were transferred to a new "Oceans and Coasts" branch within the DEA; the rest are with the DAFF.

"We are duplicating everything, it is hugely expensive," said Shaheen Moolla, a former chief director within Marine and Coastal Management. Moolla was scathing about DAFF, saying it "is in such chaos, they can't even tell us if the sun is shining outside".

Confusion over the Hobart conference relates mainly to Mayekiso, one of three senior DEA officials scheduled to attend the month-long Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR).

Mayekiso was appointed South African CCAMLR commissioner last year. He has not stepped down from the position despite all fisheries functions now falling under DAFF.

Oceans and Coasts spokesman Zolile Nqayi said there was no reason for Mayekiso to step down: "How can he refuse to relinquish this role when the department has not asked him to?"

Nqayi also defended DEA's right to attend the conference, and questioned DAFF's role there: "The last time I checked, fisheries did not have a conservation mandate."

DAFF spokesman Carol Moses said: "Following the transfer of functions between the two departments, certain role clarifications . . . are to be finalised and have not been concluded yet."