



## FROM THE CHAIR

Hi all,

Spring has sprung – or has it? As I write my report for the Spring of 2008 news letter, I have just read an e-mail from Sheila on the conditions at the farm this very weekend, and I quote “ In the nearly 40 years that I have been going to Middelpunt, I have never experienced weather like we had this weekend. However, from Witbank, the mist started and by the time we got to Belfast the fog was so thick I could hardly see where the road went and with the major, major road works along the stretch from the highway to Belfast, it was really scary and even worse from Belfast to the farm where, for the rest of Thursday and the whole of Friday the fog remained so thick one could hardly see the shareholders block and of course jolly cold and windy too”. Please remember that the weather at the farm can change in the matter of a couple of hours from what was expected to something out of an adventure movie.



This unexpected change in weather topic leads me to table an incident that I was told took place at the farm in the last couple of months. In this week’s “believe it nor not section”, someone, and by definition one of our members or their guests, arrived at the farm without sufficient bedding. So, they took the curtain down from the dining room and used it as a blanket.

The committee and shareholders spend a lot of their own time, for which neither are compensated in any way what-so-ever, to ensure that the farm is of such a standard that our members can relax and enjoy the great facility. So please remember, that whilst you are pay-

ing subscriptions to utilize the facilities at the farm, it remains both a privilege and a shared facility and therefore practice the following:

- if you break something, put it in the maintenance book in the shareholders
- if you pull the curtain off of the railing, put it back PROPERLY
- if you pull the plug off of the chain in a basin, put it back PROPERLY
- be reasonable and consider other peoples' space and property at ALL times

A survey has been sent to all members so that we can establish the level of satisfaction, or otherwise, currently being experi-



enced by our members – please take the time to complete it and send to [artist@cherlyee.co.za](mailto:artist@cherlyee.co.za).

In conclusion, the AGM will be held in October, and if anyone would like to stand / volunteer to join the committee, please contact Sheila with your details.

Regards,

Kevin

## Editorial

*I have to say that for the second newsletter in a row I have screwed up. This newsletter should have gone out in September and even I can't bullshit that its evens close to September (those dark orange traffic lights that we have all gone through). I humbly apologise to you all and to my fellow committee members.*

### **ITS AGM TIME AGAIN.**

- *The farm will be closed for the AGM Weekend because we all know that you should be at the friggin meeting not at the Farm!*
- *Sandton Field and Study Centre as per usual.*
- *Bring and Braai.*
- *11.30AM for Noon. The meeting will start promptly, this I know for I am married to the Chairmans sister and the whole family is genetically programmed to be at least 45 minutes early for everything! They call it "on time" I call it "premature ....".*

## UNDERWATER AND UNDERGROUND

A DISSERTATION BY PETER (PISCATORIALLY SPEAKING) ARDERNE

Fortunately the excellent rains in the first half of the year have meant that we enter Spring with all our dams full. The dams are quite weedy but Len and his team spent 2 full days in August mechanically weeding No 3 so this dam is much improved. As this is such a labour intensive and unpleasant task we have purchased a special pump powered by a Honda engine that will deliver the herbicide,

Midstream, which is registered for the control of aquatic weed. John Carter and Peter tested it in early September on patches of weed in Dams 1, 2, 3 and 4 and we wait to see how effective this is. The objective of course is not to remove all the weed but to create better access for bank anglers in popular spots.

As the water warms up bass will become more active and we ask you not to return them. Kill them all and those that are big enough are certainly good eating. Our attitude to trout is quite different these days and a large percentage of Middelpunt trout are released which is great because it improves the quality of fishing. However, as summer approaches bear in mind that trout stress very quickly when the water warms up. If you practice Catch & Release use de-barbed hooks, get your fish to the bank as quickly as possible and always wet your hands when handling the fish. It is better if the fish is not removed from the water but supported in an upright position until it has recovered. You may have to help it away from the bank into cooler water.

Lastly, it does help in managing the fishery if a reasonable percentage of ungutted fish are weighed **accurately** and then recorded. Please do not try and guesstimate the weight by adding on 10% to the weight of the trout once you have cleaned it. This is because the contents of the stomach cavity can weigh anything from 13% to 25% of the total weight depending on the sex, condition, time of year etc. Therefore, if you cannot weigh it ungutted at the recording table or with a correctly calibrated scale just enter the date, dam number and length remembering also that browns are only stocked in dams 1, 2 and 3 so it is highly unlikely that you will find them in 6 or 7.

## The Mining Threat

No doubt you have heard that much of Mpumalanga has been threatened by coal mining. Considerable damage has already been done to the escarpment area from Belfast through to Ermelo and the DTF has already had to defend its own property and those of its neighbours against this pernicious threat. Firstly, it had to contribute to a fund established to fight off a mining company that was demanding access to the Elandskloof block just to our northeast and includes the Combrink family farms. This appears to have been successful but shortly thereafter we learnt that a BEE company had applied for prospecting rights on the Middelpunt block and two surrounding blocks of land. Fortunately we moved very quickly to lodge an objection and this application to prospect has been denied.

## *A Clear and present danger*

What do the thousands of fly fishers who target trout in South Africa know about our new environmental legislation, the National Environmental Management Act (NEMA) of 1998 and its sister Act, the National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEM:BA) of 2004? Possibly if they have followed the reports in the media and in the fly fishing magazines they know there is a problem, but otherwise they are confused and as individual anglers their interests are largely unrepresented.

Although the objectives of these Acts are well founded, they and the proposed regulations in terms of NEM:BA, in their current form, **pose a real threat to the entire trout industry**. This includes recreational angling and the large aquaculture sector that produces table fish and trout for stocking purposes. For example if government accepts the proposed regulations it will be extremely difficult

to stock trout or fish for trout or practise catch and release. Likewise the fish farmers will be faced with major problems if they wish to continue producing trout.

The Federation of Southern African Flyfishers (FOSAF) has been negotiating with the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) for the last five years to find a solution to this problem. Although FOSAF recognises that the protection of indigenous species must take priority and that we cannot expect any protection for alien and invasive fishes in the future, there is a strong case for managing the trout industry correctly especially in the light of the economic benefits derived therefrom.

FOSAF accepts that the introduction of trout has been to the detriment of our indigenous fishes. An example of this is in the Western Cape where both rainbow and brown trout have had a significant impact on the populations of the vulnerable indigenous minnows. On the other hand the damage due to trout is nowhere near as serious as that caused by the alien bass or carp. Likewise our indigenous fish such as sharp tooth catfish (barbel) can cause immense harm when transferred to systems where they do not occur naturally. While there is no doubt that trout can be invasive the potential for this in South Africa is very limited as trout require cool, unpolluted water with a high oxygen content. For this reason they are very unlikely to spread beyond the places where they already occur and this represents a comparatively small area of our country.

FOSAF believes that the solution is the creation of certain trout zones that would be largely based on the areas in which they already occur such as the Trout Triangle of Mpumalanga. Within these zones

trout would be listed as exempted aliens while outside these zones they would be prohibited invasive aliens. The Act already makes provision for this just as the Conservation of Agricultural Resources Act No 43 of 1983 makes provision for the use of Black Wattle in agriculture in certain designated areas but prohibits it outside these areas.

Fortunately FOSAF have a very strong negotiating team in the form of their Environmental sub-committee led by Dr Bill Bainbridge who is assisted by an environmental lawyer and aquatic scientists. After years of work these volunteers have prepared what will probably be their final submission to DEAT. To view or download this document and other submissions visit [www.fosaf.co.za](http://www.fosaf.co.za). This paper includes the views of other stakeholders in the Trout Industry Interest Group and it is believed that this combined force will have a much stronger hand when negotiating with the authorities and there is a good chance of a

positive outcome in the near future. If this prediction is correct the trout industry will have much to thank Bill Bainbridge's team for. Over the last few years they have voluntarily spent many hundreds of hours to ensure that trout have a future in South Africa. As DEAT do not reimburse NGO's for their travel and accommodation costs, and these have been considerable, expenses have had to be met by FOSAF.

## **AGM**

**26 October 2008**

**Sandton Field and Study**

**11.30AM for Noon.**

**Bring Wallet, food, drinks**

**Leave, preconceptions and belligerent attitudes (except for the editor who if he left that at home would have nothing to bring.**

**If you can't make it - please send wallet full of cash.**