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Conservation Officer Report for the NBAA AGM 2017:

Overview of the duties and position of the Conservation Officer:

The Conservation Officer forms part of the Executive Committee of the NBAA and reports to the Chairman of the NBAA. The Conservation Officer has the power of one vote on the Executive Committee. The conservation office is held for a period of 3 years in order to ensure that continuity and long term strategic planning can be implemented and thoroughly executed.

Responsibility and Authority of the Conservation Officer:

The NBAA has appointed one Executive Conservation Officer who, irrespective of other responsibilities, has responsibility and authority that includes:

1. Ensuring that bass conservational and environmental objectives are established at relevant functions and levels within the NBAA.
2. Ensuring that processes needed for the conservational and environmental system are established implemented and maintained within the NBAA.
3. Reporting to the association on the performance of the conservation and environmental system and submit proposals towards any need for improvement.
4. Ensuring the promotion of conservation and environmental awareness throughout the organization through training and education.
5. Liaison with governmental departments on matters relating to the bass conservation and the bass environment.
6. Implements, co-ordinates and manages a national conservation and environmental awareness.
7. Liaises with other freshwater facets within the NFFA on bass conservation and environmental issues.
8. Identifies the processes needed for the conservational and environmental management system and its application throughout the organization and determines criteria and methods needed to ensure that both the operation and control of these processes are effective.
9. Ensures the identification of resources and information necessary to support the operation and monitoring of these processes and monitors, measures and analyses these processes.
10. Implement actions necessary to achieve planned results and continual improvement of these processes.

Bass resource management, measurement, analysis and improvements

The Conservation Officer:

1. Regularly conducts measurement and analysis of environmental data.
2. Regularly conducts measurements, documenting and analysis of bass related environmental data. These include but are not limited to:
 - a) Bass length measurements and bass weights relations
 - b) Bass numbers caught
 - c) Conditional analysis of bass caught.
3. Reports results of measurements and analysis of environmental data to the NBAA.
4. Plans and executes bass conservation efforts. These include but are not limited to:
 - a) Bass relocation efforts
 - b) Bass feeding efforts
 - c) Bass culling efforts
 - d) Identification and establishment of future bass waters.

Management responsibility:

The conservation officer provides evidence of commitment to the development and implementation of the conservation and environmental management system and continually improving its effectiveness by:

1. Communicating to members the importance of meeting NBAA as well as statutory and regulatory requirements through conservation and environmental awareness training.
2. Adhering to the established environmental policy and conservation objectives as stated in the relevant Namibian Acts and Regulations.
3. Conducting reviews through physical and statistical evaluation annually.
4. Requesting resources for interpretation and implementation of agreed conservation and environmental policy and conservation and environmental objectives.

The NBAA plans to review the organization's conservation and environmental system, annually, to ensure its continuing suitability, adequacy and effectiveness. This review includes assessing opportunities for improvement and the need for changes to the conservation and environmental system, including conservation and environmental objectives.

Recap on the Conservation goals that were set out for the year 2017:

Short Term Conservation efforts for the year 2017:

- To ensure that the anglers are informed about properly handling bass, how to keep bass in the live well, ways to ensure successful catch and release in all events.
- To obligate each boat to have at hand weighted clips to help bass that want to turn in the live-well.
- To have a can-crusher and rubbish bin at the weigh station at every event.
- Give information on handling fish, deflating fish that was caught in deep water through the flotation bladder etc.
- Sending out important information on conservation ideas and methods to all NBAA anglers.

Medium Term Conservation efforts for the year 2017:

- Applying to the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources for the approval of the application from the NBAA to import new bass stock from other countries.
- To ensure that the weigh station has a functional live-well.
- To successfully catch and relocate bass from Friedenau to the other Dams.
- To restock Hardap Dam with bass.
- To actively monitor the bass population in order to choose the best management style for each Dam.

For the most part we have very experienced anglers in the NBAA who have the experience and know how on unhooking a deep swallowed hook or reviving a fish which is turning in the live-well. I feel that most of our anglers know how to properly handle bass and that we are in the habit of taking care of bass and not harming them.

Through the hard and timeous effort of Mr R. Grant the applications for importing bass and restocking dams in Namibia has been approved by the Ministry of Fisheries. The Ministry of Fisheries has accepted the applications but on a few conditions that have to be met.

One of the conditions stated by the Ministry of Fisheries was that we the NBAA must appoint a qualified person who can conduct studies and compile a detailed impact study report on the introduction of bass in an ecosystem. Mr Neil Deacon was appointed by the NBAA to conduct such a study. We are eagerly awaiting the reports as he conducted studies on 3 of our Dams, namely: Von Bach Dam, Oanob Dam and Hardap Dam.

Long Term Conservation efforts for the year 2016 & 2017:

The efforts for a long term plan or idea should mainly consist of proper management of bass and resources in Namibia.

- Relocate bass to specific dams such as Von Bach, Oanob and Hardap dam to ensure that new blood is introduced and that bass stay in a competitive mode for breeding and feeding.
- Start a fully functional bass breeding project in order to breed the F1 Hybrid "Gorilla Bass". (This will take a lot of planning and capital to realise)
- Monitoring the fish population and deciding when to cull bass and when to add food (Tilapia) and when to add more bass. (The use of electrofishing will be the best way to gather more accurate information and then make decisions on culling or adding bass or food). This process will demand a lot of time and will be costly.

The New Weigh-Station:

The NBAA has completed its Weigh-Station and has used it for the year of 2017.

The design and planning of the Weigh Station was done by Mr Grant and Mr Goosen. The Building of the Weigh Station was done by Mr Kruger. The new Weigh Station serves as the practical weigh in platform for the anglers, advertising for companies and sponsors and then rehabilitation centre (Bass Hospital) for bass that have trouble regaining strength or bass that are stressed when weighed in. The Bass Hospital however has been put on hold as funds for the piping etc. was not available at the time.

Dam levels in 2017:

The Dams have received good amounts of inflow. Oanob still holds a good amount of water and Von Bach is being fed with water from different reservoirs. The general opinion was that once the dams receive water the catching of fish will increase which did not realise.

This was due to the drastic rising of the water levels in both of the dams, poor water quality, algi blooms, constantly changing weather patterns etc.

Fishing statistics for the Year 2017:

Oanob Dam

Oanob dam received a substantial amount of inflow in 2016/2017. In 2017 average amounts of inflow were recorded. Water levels have dropped since the last inflow in 2017.

Fishing this year was one of the toughest I have ever experienced. If the fishing continues to be as difficult as it is, I fear that the sport of Bass Fishing in Namibia will unfortunately loose some or a large part of its members due to the poor fishing.

The general condition of the bass at Oanob Dam is good. The few fish that got caught were well fed (fat in the tail and hump section) throughout the year. Body slime and scale condition of the bass was observed to be good. No fish were seen to have LMBV or any other fungus infections.

There is however a concern from my side on the spawning activity for the year 2017.

It is of my opinion that the spawn of this year at Oanob Dam was not as successful as the previous years. There were only a few bass that were seen on nests and it was only the very big females that spawned.

Throughout 2017 large amounts of small tilapia (fry and fingerlings) were seen. Large bait balls were seen by anglers on their finders.

Von Bach Dam

Oanob dam received a substantial amount of inflow in 2016/2017. In 2017 average amounts of inflow were recorded. Water levels have increased since the last inflow in 2017. The Local authority Nam Water is currently pumping water into Von Bach from other water sources/ reservoirs.

The fishing statistics for this year's fishing was one of the dull sides. Fishing was one of the toughest I have experienced. If the fishing proceeds at the current rate I fear that the sport of Bass Fishing in Namibia will unfortunately loose some of its members due to the poor fish catching statistics.

The general condition of the bass at Von Bach Dam is good. The few fish that got caught were well fed (fat in the tail and hump section) throughout the year. Body slime and scale condition of the bass was observed to be good. No fish were seen to have LMBV or any other fungus infections.

There is however a concern from my side on the spawning activity for the year 2017. We were not able to see spawning fish due to the stained water. No fingerlings or fry could be identified.

Throughout 2017 large amounts of small tilapia (fry and fingerlings) were seen. Large bait balls were seen by anglers on their finders.

Closed off areas:

At all the NBAA National Competitions held in 2017 the tournament director opened all areas for fishing. However the decision to close off some areas for the year 2018 might be agreed upon again, due to the failing bass stock and breeding of bass.

The decision to return to the cut off period of one (1) week was taken, what effect it might have had on the tournament day is not certain.

Live-wells / live fish release in all NFFA affiliated associations:

In 2017 this office strives again to get all NFFA affiliated associations on board with the use of live-wells / live fish release in all association events (club competitions, trials, nationals, internationals etc.)

Freshwater angling is a nationally and internationally recognized sport in Namibia and has a very high standing at the Namibian Sports Council. It would be in the interest of all member associations to put conservation of resources (water and fish) on their agenda. This includes:

- The live release of fish (especially larger specimens of a species) after having been caught and weighed in
- The minimizing of stress on fish during a competition, which is not limited to but includes:
 - Use of re-circulated and aerated life-wells to keep fish alive during the day (associations who make use of boats)
 - Minimal handling of fish
 - Reduction of out-of-water times
 - All day open weigh-in stations, or mobile weigh-in procedure, where large specimens are weighted and released quickly.
 - Use of recognized additives/ formulas in live-wells to ensure stress reduction and survival of fish when released after weigh-in.

These procedures will ensure that future generations will also be able to practice and enjoy the sport of bass fishing.

Summary:

As the Conservation Officer of the NBAA, my third year in the conservation office seat and serving on the NBAA EXCO board, I would like to thank the NBAA Exco and its members for all your efforts in ensuring that bass were looked after, even though only a few were caught. The year was tough in regards with fishing, changing climate, water quality and other factors affecting the bass in a direct and indirect manner.

It is of my opinion that the fishing success will increase when the instructions from Mr Neil Deacon are followed. Introducing large numbers of new bass into our dams and looking after our fry/ fingerlings. This will lift the pressure on the eco-system and will decrease the stress the fish are experiencing. I hope that the conservation officer filling this post next will strive to serve the NBAA and its members in order to ensure that all conservation efforts are met and bass thrive in the waters of Namibia.

Regards

Hendrik Pretorius
NBAA Conservation Officer
14th November 2017