



**St Helena Commercial Fishermen's Association
Alarm Forest
St Helena Island**

24th August 2020

**Governor in Council
The Castle
Jamestown
St Helena Island**

Dear Governor in Council,

RE: Formal submission of Island wide petition

The St Helena Commercial Fishermen's Association (SHCFA) hereby formally submits their petition, entitled "*Fishing is Everybody's Business*", to Governor in Council to demonstrate the island wide discontent with the current fisheries process.

You will of course be aware that out of courtesy, we had included the petition on the agenda of a meeting proposed with Elected Members, SHG officials and FCO officials, on 15th July. Sadly, SHG and FCO officials cancelled their attendance last minute – perhaps if officials had met, questions could have been answered which would have voided the need for a petition? Following these numerous failed attempts to meet with SHG officials in order to obtain information and clarity on the developments occurring within the fishing industry on St Helena, and following comments about the SHCFA perhaps not representing the wider community of St Helena but only the opinion of a few individuals, the SHCFA decided to launch an island-wide petition to:

- Explain and disseminate our concerns;
- Engage with and listen to feedback from the community;
- Ascertain whether indeed the community shared our concerns and supported the SHCFA.

As of [2019](#), St Helena has a resident population of 4,534; of which 2,932 were in the age range 16-64. The SHCFA decided that this age range demonstrated a robust and wide representation of the Island as a whole and so, we set our initial target at 900 signatures (approximately one third of this demographic range) over the course of a four-six week period of full time focused campaigning.

After only **4 days** of full time campaigning during a 3 week open process, we exceeded our target – obtaining support from **1,191** members of the community, all of whom openly declared their support for our petition. In total, in excess of **25** fishermen from all backgrounds – commercial, sports, SHCFA members and non-SHCFA members – all signed the petition. This is exclusive of recreational fishers; as the number of people that participate in this sector is far-reaching. Furthermore, our online version of the petition has garnered an additional **228** signatures – of which **55%** are definitely Saints living abroad – bringing the grand total for signatories of the petition to a staggering **1,419**.

While certain SHG officials also signed their name and two Directorates expressly requested permission to be able to sign the petition, we were astounded by the number of SHG and associated employees, that approached *us*, expressing their desire to sign but stating that they were simply too scared of the potential repercussions for their job. In addition to this, a number of members of the community also stated that they felt too intimidated to sign the petition following [quote] "*the government's threat to shut the factory*". We thanked these individuals for their honesty and respected their decision not to sign, but promised them that we would raise their fears with you all as their Elected Members. This is not an example of free speech or democracy – this, sadly, is an example of callous, misleading statements causing people to feel that they cannot express their true feelings. We implore you to take the time to read the names and signatures of all **1,191** of your constituents who gave their time to demonstrate to you how they feel. The diverse range of sectors, backgrounds, ages and positions in the community of the signatories is something that the SHCFA is incredibly proud of and we are simply bowled over by just how many people wholeheartedly and *publicly* support and agree with our concerns.

We hosted a public meeting in July to further promote transparency and engage with the community to answer any concerns or queries people might have regarding the work of the SHCFA, the petition, or our proposal – nearly 40 people attended, including two Elected Members. Not one member of SHG attended. As the petition came to a close, constituency meetings commenced in all eight districts and again we saw the public becoming vocal with regard to fisheries. Even when discussing other topics, common areas of concern raised by the public *mirrored* those of fisheries discussions; a lack of transparency, a lack of stakeholder engagement, the feeling of exclusion, and funding/economic considerations trumping any and all environmental and social considerations. This is indeed a sad sentiment for the island as a whole and something we hope is fully contemplated by Members.

The SHCFA notes that since the launch of our petition which calls for the exclusion of local fishers to stop and for transparency to increase (among other things) – and after more than 8 months of silence from the preferred bidders – we have seen more activity in our papers/on our radio stations than ever before. Indeed the 'invite' to the cooperative was only released in one of the papers, the day after our petition closed and the subsequent notice for the first 'Q & A' was announced with less than 24 hours' notice – which seems rushed and for many meant we could not attend. While the information released in the paper is, in itself conflicting, we nevertheless followed the advice of the most recent advert and sent some 18 questions directly to Johann M. Bezuidenhout on 16th August in the hope of gaining clarity and opening dialogue. A substantive response to most of our questions was received on the 19th August, after probing for our email to be answered prior to the 1st open meeting that took place on Thursday, 20th August for all involved in the fishing industry. The content of this email along with the revelations made in the meeting on Thursday, confirms the need for our petition to go ahead.

The SHCFA prides itself on being proactive and we try to provide industry specific solutions relating to our areas of concern. As such, we would politely suggest the following:

1. Governor in Council takes time to digest the petition and its contents
2. Once the Governor in Council has had time to absorb the detail of the petition; we would welcome the opportunity to openly discuss its contents, so that SHG and elected members fully understand our concerns

3. A meeting is set up between Governor in Council, Elected Members, Chief Economist, Director of ENRP and SHCFA at the earliest opportunity to discuss next steps.

We kindly ask that the SHCFA receives a response to the above suggestions by no later than Friday of this week, 28th August 2020. This would provide adequate lead times for such meetings, taking into account that elected members will be in recess from the 1st – 04th September. It would also give us the opportunity to prepare for such a meeting; hence we would encourage you to advise us of areas that you might require additional information or clarity.

We look forward to receiving your cooperative response with the hope that we can address the many issues currently surrounding our fishery.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Waylon Thomas', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Waylon Thomas
Chair of the SHCFA