

CLIMATE CHANGE

Searcher Geodata returns to South Africa to pursue seismic surveys off the West Coast

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Following a court ruling that halted its operations off the West Coast and saw Searcher Geodata leave South African waters, the company has returned for another attempt to complete its seismic surveys. Small-scale fishers, however, are still opposed to such activity.

The geoscience and tech exploration company Searcher Geodata has returned to South Africa in the hopes of conducting seismic surveys off the West Coast, just months after the company was chased off South African waters by an [urgent interdict](#) in March.

In a circulated announcement, the UK company said it was inviting participants as it sought to conduct seismic surveys about 256km offshore of St Helena Bay to 220km offshore of Hondeklop Bay. The company had previously stated it would not return to South Africa should the interdict be granted.

The company had hired SLR Consulting to conduct the halted survey but has now obtained the services of Environmental Impact Management Services as the environmental assessment practitioner.

Alan Hopping, the general manager at Searcher Seismic, told *Daily Maverick* that the second attempt at the surveying was to answer the question: "Does South Africa have its own natural resources that could provide safe, reliable and affordable energy for all South Africans?"

He added: "We have taken on board the learnings from our last attempt and are planning to address

In his March ruling in the Western Cape High Court to halt Searcher's exploration, Judge Daniel Thulare said: "If Searcher truly wanted to ensure that [small-scale fishers] were included in the consultation process, it would have advertised [notices of the survey] in isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans."

This time, notices of the survey were advertised in the three languages. However, Pedro Garcia, the chairperson of the South African United Fishing Front, told *Daily Maverick* that this didn't mean they took into consideration the local dynamics of affording access to the information or guaranteed that people understood the issues being raised.



"It is the voice of the people who are directly impacted that needs to be heard. But, by the same token, they also need to be capacitated. It's not as simple as saying, we support it or we don't support it. The problem is in the consultation processes, and whose voice is eventually heard when we have these conflicts or litigation arising after the fact.

"So, our position is really clear: we will maintain a neutral position on this issue until the consultation