

KELP HELP

Michael Dudu at work on the Abagold farm near Hermanus

PICTURE: TRACEY ADAMS



WET PASTURES

FARMING ABALONE - ON LAND

Hermanus business is combating dwindling perlemoen numbers

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STAFF REPORTER

ABALONE may be predominantly found in our seas, but in Hermanus it is farmed on land.

The Cape Argus witnessed the process during a visit to Abagold - one of three abalone farms in the town - as part of a delegation attending the first aquaculture conference hosted in Africa.

The conference, hosted by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and attended by delegates from 61 countries, ended on Friday.

Christo du Plessis, managing director at Abagold, which has been in operation since 1995, said the farm was jointly

managed by the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and the Department of Public Works.

The abalone is bred in 32 000 baskets and there are about seven million of them on the farm. The male and female are kept in separate baskets where they produce sperm and eggs. The egg and sperm is then brought together and the resulting larvae are kept in bags lined with algae, which they feed on.

From eight months, the abalone start to eat seaweed, which is also grown on the farm, and are kept until they are five years old, when they are processed and canned and exported to the Far East.

Du Plessis said they do not take any abalone from the sea. "The only thing we borrow from the sea is water, which is pumped back into the sea."

He said the advantage of farming abalone instead of fish was that the process used no chemicals and the only waste was from the kelp.

The seven-hectare farm employs 350 people.

Du Plessis said an important part of their business was research and they were currently experimenting with putting abalone into the sea in areas where it did not occur before.

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