

# Sing the stink blues

A group of Hout Bay artists will become the voice of frustrated residents complaining about the stench coming from the Oceana factory.



PICTURE: FRESH AIR HOUT BAY FACEBOOK PAGE

■ Smoke from the Oceana fish processing plant during a production cycle.

VERNA VAN DIEMEN

A group of Hout Bay musicians will be recording a song and mini-documentary to voice their frustration with the emissions and smell emanating from Oceana's fishmeal processing factory in Hout Bay.

Inspired by the smell, resident and musician Ike Moriz wrote a song titled *Lucky Star ain't what you are*.

"I got so angry this morning (when he smelled the odour) that I had to give voice to my frustration and feeling of powerlessness in light of this abuse in our own home through Oceana/Lucky Star's noxious stench that I wrote this song and quickly recorded it at home.

Mr Moriz, who has been living in Hout Bay for 10 years, said the smell and emissions have become worse over the past few years.

"It has never been this bad. It is terrible to have your kids wake you up in the night saying 'papa, my head aches and I'm nauseous. I wake up with sore eyes, headache and blocked up sinuses in the middle of the night and a hell of a stench in the air," he

said.

Mr Moriz has been part of a group actively campaigning for Oceana to get rid of the stench and thick smoke which emanates from the factory when it processes fish meal.

He and a group of residents have turned up the pressure for the company to act on their request.

Their efforts include starting a website and Facebook page "Fresh Air Hout Bay – smells fishy?" – which has about 1 200 followers.

This, said Mr Moriz, was a platform for people to air their views and get information.

They have also picked up on an old online petition for which they gathered about 1 200 signatures.

In addition, Mr Moriz said, they have been advised by the City of Cape Town to get residents to sign affidavits in which people can list the way the stench has affected their health, their social or economic well-being with a timeline.

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# City is meeting with Oceana to improve odour monitoring

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The City will use these affidavits to assess the affected persons' complaints against production run dates and times, as reported to the City by Oceana.

Resident Helen Hays, who suffers from fibromyalgia, a medical condition which causes chronic widespread pain, said: "When the stench is there I can't sleep properly. It exacerbates my fibromyalgia. The pain is worse, I can't sleep. It's awful."

Oceana acknowledge their operation results in odours but they are not aware of any technology which can completely eliminate the smells associated with fishmeal production.

Oceana CEO Francois Kuttel said: "The only way to completely eliminate the smell would be to close down the factory and to cease all operation."

But this, said Mr Moriz, is not what they want.

"We don't want the plant to close down. We understand there are people employed at the plant and we do not want people to lose their jobs. About 110 Hout Bay residents are permanently employed and they have 200 seasonal workers. We just have the constitutional right of well-being, of not having to experience this," he said.

Mr Kuttel said he has been actively engaging with the community and in 2014 when they held a

meeting with residents they indicated they would "freely share all required information with a community appointed technical consultant... who has an open invitation to visit the facility and to audit the company's production methods."

But Mr Moriz said Oceana had always made it clear that they did not feel the smell was unreasonable, unacceptable or intolerable.

Mr Moriz said his requests to see an independent report on the factory's chemical emissions has not been heard.

Mr Kuttel said: "The report has been provided to the Licensing Authority and stack emissions were noted to be well in compliance with limits as set by the West Coast District Municipality."

Resident Barry Wessels said he has even invited some of Oceana's board of directors to his home to experience the smell, but he has not had a response.

Mr Wessels moved to Hout Bay in 2006 and was told by the estate agent that the smell lasted for just a few days in the year.

He has, for the past two years been corresponding with the City about the matter.

Mr Wessels believes the City should act against Oceana.

"Everyone has gone on the health issue – don't go there – it's difficult to prove.

"The City is empowered by the State and it is their responsibility solely to manage our constitutional



rights in respect of by-laws.

"I just think the City is not standing up to its obligations in terms of the constitution and nuisance. If your dog barks for more than five minutes, they can do something about it. But Oceana's emissions are uncontrolled in terms of odour and discomfort to us," he said.

"It impinges on the free right to enjoy your property."

Siyabulela Mamkeli, Mayco member for health, said the City is considering undertaking a review of the Atmospheric Emission Licence, which is up for renewal in November, to tighten up on operating conditions and further improve odour monitoring capability.

"We are meeting with Lucky Star's senior management next week to discuss the matter."

Mr Mamkeli said in terms of leg-

■ Hout Bay residents Helen Hays, Ike Moriz and Barry Wessels, say they are smothering under Oceana fish meal plant's stench.



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"We therefore cannot license a knowingly malodorous business on the one hand, and then prosecute them for emitting foul odours in terms of a nuisance by-law on the other hand – especially since there are no further significant remedial measures that can be implemented," said Mr Mamkeli.

Emissions from the factory are monitored in two ways.

Firstly, the factory conducts annual emissions testing by an independent specialist consultant and reports these results to the City; and secondly by monitoring ambient air quality data received via the Western Cape Government owned and operated ambient air quality monitoring station, which is located at the Sentinel Primary School in Hangberg.

The City said, over the recent long weekend, when they received a number of complaints, they accessed the ambient monitoring station data.

"This data showed that the levels of hydrogen sulphide recorded were below known internationally recognised health risk assessment levels," Mr Mamkeli said.

● Mr Moriz and a group of top SA musicians, videographers and video editors living in Hout Bay will be recording the song on Tuesday May 12 at a studio in Constantia.