



**Tanga Tourism Network Association
(TATONA)**

**Letter to the Regional Commissioner Tanga – January 2012
Re: Daily rampant Dynamite Fishing along the Tanga coast**



Honourable Regional Commissioner,

It is with great respect, but also growing desperation that we, the Board of Directors of TATONA, the Tanga Tourism Network Association and representatives of the emerging and very promising tourism industry in Tanga, write to you about a situation that is now getting totally out of control, and every day destroys the very base of not only our business, but also the livelihood of millions of poor Tanzanians. In addition, this is now even seriously tarnishing the international image and reputation of Tanzania, in the tourism industry and in the conservation world.

We are talking about **Dynamite fishing**.

In a recent world map of the Global Reefs at Risk initiative (see above), Tanzania is indicated as the **only African country**, where dynamite fishing occurs. For reasons that are worth investigating, the use of explosives for fishing is not known in the neighbouring countries Kenya and Mozambique that also have long coast lines. Tanzanian leaders should ask themselves, why this is so. Maybe marine governance and enforcement of the fisheries legislation is much more effective there? For example, it is known, that in Kenya, the possession, trade and use of explosives is treated as a treasonable offence that attracts the highest penalties. Maybe something for Tanzania to emulate?

Coral reefs are among the most precious marine resources in Tanzania that provide both, livelihoods for a large section of coastal people (23% of the total population), and source of income for the local and export-oriented fishing industry, as well as the rapidly growing marine tourism industry.

As a result of Dynamite fishing, many coral reefs of Tanga (and of the country as a whole) are already seriously degraded. Each blast kills all fish and other living organisms within a 20 m radius and completely destroys the reef habitat. As only 3% of killed organisms are harvested, it is also the most wasteful fishing method.

With numerous blasts occurring daily on reefs all along the Tanga coast already over decades, the cumulative effect has been devastating. A survey conducted in Tanga region already in the nineties showed that 10% of coral reefs were damaged beyond recovery, while 70% had significant damage but could recover if protected. These figures must be much worse now. Once blasted to rubble, corals take decades, even centuries to grow back, and some reefs will never make it again as a result of continued blasting.

While the government and the tourism industry try very hard to gain a greater share in the international quality tourism market, it has to be acknowledged that dynamite fishing is a devastating threat to marine tourism. Prospects are bleak in particular for the diving industry, as blasts in the vicinity of SCUBA divers can destroy their eardrums and lead to certain death by drowning. This hasn't happened yet fortunately, but one such case will certainly produce very negative international headlines with dire consequences for the industry.

From our coast and beach hotels, we can easily hear, and sometimes see, up to 7-8 dynamite blasts on a single day, especially during low tides and when the sea is calm. We now also get reports of blasting during full moon nights. This is a new and depressing development.

Indeed, it is a very shocking sight for hundreds of tourists, that coral reefs are blasted to rubble right in front of their eyes when on the beach, or when snorkelling to admire the immense beauty of the underwater treasures that Tanzania could truly be proud of, if not devastated. Some visitors have now already reported this to their travel agents back home, and

written letters to newspapers about their experiences, which is very bad publicity for Tanzania as a safe travel destination, that so much depends on nature conservation as a prime attraction.

By blasting reefs, dynamite fishers also destroy aggregations and breeding grounds of pelagic finfish, an increasingly important source of food and high-value export. Sadly, dynamite fishers do not only target the coral reefs. They have now also started using dynamite to fish for tuna fish, an extremely destructive practice, during which several hundred large (20kg – 60kg) tunas are killed and sink immediately to the bottom of the ocean in deep water, only to float back up to the surface a few days later, rotten and un-edible.

Of the several hundred tunas that they kill using dynamite, the fishers are only able to collect a few pieces before they sink to the bottom. And as a result of only a few days of blasting, the surviving tuna schools move away from Tanga. Thus not only do the dynamite fishers succeed in killing several hundred tuna that are wasted (and witnessed by many other fishers), but they also succeed in ensuring that other fishers, who use legitimate fishing methods and who depend on the tunas to increase their income actually get nothing.

It is the poor artisanal fishers, who depend on handlines, basket traps and nets for their daily food and some extra cash, who are punished for using legal fishing methods, as their catches are now seriously diminishing all along the coast, as a result of the criminal activities of some few unscrupulous people, their supporters and 'sponsors' both in business and local government.

We all know, and there is no doubt in the public about this, that dynamite fishing is illegal, but the deadly practice continues in front of the eyes of everybody, coastal residents, villagers, fishers, tourists and hotel operators, and last but not least, fisheries officers.

Stakeholders see the main reason for this shocking reality in a serious lack of law enforcement by the respective authorities at all levels, in particular also by the courts of law, where dynamiters are often acquitted or given fines that are far below the legal minimum, and released after a few days, only to continue blasting, and also threaten those law-abiding citizens who co-operate with law enforcement organs.

In Tanga region, this situation has not always been like this. For example, between 1994-2004, the Tanga Coastal Zone Conservation and Development Programme (TCZCDP) has, with help of the Navy, reduced blast fishing for several years. However, after the simultaneous withdrawal of Navy and IUCN around 2004, dynamite fishing quickly resurfaced to pre-project levels.

After the demise of the TCZCDP, a specially designated Fisheries Patrol Unit was posted to Tanga to help in law enforcement. This unit had the mandate and well equipped patrol boats stationed at several places along the coast.

However, after one of their brave officers suffered a vicious acid attack in April 2011 that cost him an eye (see photo above) and one patrol boat was burned at Kigombe, it became clear that the dynamiters have now become a force in Tanga that can openly challenge Government staff and property, and that much stronger measures are needed to fight these criminal gangs who organize the explosives, employ fishers to do the blasts, market the ill-gotten fish, and finally, make sure that anybody caught in the act is not convicted according to the law, but gets released within a few days to take revenge on anybody reporting them!

There is also no lack of public support. A wide range of stakeholders have on numerous occasions monitored and reported dynamite blasts, and also provided a "blacklist" with names of known dynamiters.

However, all these initiatives have not yet been successful for a number of reasons. Contrary to common claims, lack of funding cannot be one of them, as it is known that the Marine and Coastal Environment Management Project (MACEMP) that is very generously funded by the World Bank, supports the Fisheries Department and local authorities with many millions of US\$ for research, training, buildings, equipment, thus removing excuses that enforcement agencies lack capacity, equipment and operational funds.

Another important aspect that becomes increasingly worrying, especially in election times, is the easy and cheap availability of explosives in the whole country. Quarries, mines, road building projects, cement factories, the military and police are apparently unable to control 'leakages' of the stocks they are allowed to possess. It has been reported, that explosives have now even been used for burglaries in Dar es Salaam. The question is, what would stop terrorists from using dynamite as a political weapon also in Tanzania, like they do elsewhere? For reasons that are hard to understand, the country seems to be oblivious to such a possibility, and such incidents only wait to happen with dire consequences for the life and properties of people.

We believe that, with clear political will from the highest authorities in the country, from national to regional levels, dynamiting could be stopped even in the short-term. The dynamiters are individuals who are generally known to the communities and to local government. Blacklists have been handed over to the authorities in Tanga and Dar es Salaam. Adequate legislation and prosecution procedures exist on paper. Responsibility for enforcement lies with the Fisheries Division and the District officers. A mechanism for involvement of villagers in fisheries management has been established for several years, and is now also being boosted by MACEMP. Patrol boats and basic enforcement equipment are available, funding for fuel and expenses should be available through DCI budget (if not diverted to other uses as is often suspected), and the improvements that are needed to the patrols and to the judicial processes are known. Many, if not most, of the villagers would like to see an end to dynamite fishing, and generally claim that they are helpless because of "bad leadership".

Honourable Regional Commissioner, we plead with you to take immediate and effective action to stop this extremely destructive fishing practice in Tanga that destroys beautiful and productive ecosystems that would otherwise benefit not only the emerging tourism industry but also many fishing families and the coastal population for generations.

We thank you in advance for your kind attention to this matter. Please count on our full co-operation and do not hesitate to contact us for any further details.

With kind regards,

The Chairperson of TATONA