

MAYEKISO *on the line!*

ANSWERING YOUR QUESTIONS

Africa is leading the way in ocean governance

The Ministers responsible for the management of marine fisheries in Angola, Namibia and South Africa recently came together in Cape Town to signify their support for the establishment of a Benguela Current Commission – a formal institutional structure that will facilitate the understanding, protection, conservation and sustainable use of the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem (BCLME).

The BCLME is one of the richest ecosystems on earth. It stretches from just east of Port Elizabeth in South Africa, to Angola's Cabinda Province and includes the full length of Namibia and Angola's coastlines.

The ecosystem is richly endowed with commercially important fish stocks, as well as non-living resources such as diamonds, oil and gas.

Furthermore, the BCLME's location at the south western corner of the African continent means that it is situated at an important crossroad, both for ocean circulation and international shipping.

The planned Benguela Current Commission will implement an "ecosystem approach" to managing the BCLME. This means that, instead of managing living and non-living marine resources at the national

level, the three countries will work together to tackle transboundary environmental issues such as pollution, the management of shared fish stocks and the coordination of regional efforts to mitigate the impacts of marine mining as well as oil and gas production on the environment.

The establishment of the Benguela Current Commission is the logical next step in a decade-long process of building trust and cooperation between the three countries of the Benguela. Marine scientists from Angola, Namibia and South Africa have been working together since 1995, when they began to share knowledge and understanding of the Benguela Current ecosystem through the regional science programme BENEFIT (Benguela Environment Fisheries Training Interactions Programme).

More recently, scientists and fisheries managers have been working together through the BCLME Programme, a collaborative initiative that is supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The BCLME Programme has laid the groundwork for the three countries to manage the region's valuable marine and coastal resources at the ecosystem level. It has funded 75 projects which have collectively improved our knowledge of the BCLME and recommended strategies for the transboundary management of fishing, mining, oil exploration, coastal development,



■ Dr Monde Mayekiso took up the position of deputy director general in the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism in May.

biodiversity and pollution.

The planned Benguela Current Commission is only the second commission of its kind in the world. It is significant that the countries of the Benguela are setting an example in the realm of ocean governance at a time when marine and coastal biodiversity is under increasing threat.

For example, the World Wide Fund for Nature's (WWF) Living Planet Index estimates a decline of 30percent in the marine species population index between 1970 and 2000.

The IUCN Red List demonstrates that birds dependent on marine and coastal ecosystems have declined faster than any other birds - a clear indication that the marine food chain has been substantially disturbed.

So what are the benefits of cooperative ocean governance for South Africa? Our

CUMMINS MARINE STOCK

MODEL	HORSE POWER	RPM	RATING	APPLICATION
MDKBH	7KVA	1500	Prime Power	Generator
4BT3.9D(M)	50KVA	1500	Prime Power	Generator
6BT5.9D(M)	100KVA	1500	Prime Power	Generator
QSB5.9M	355	2600	Intermittent	Propulsion
KTA19M3	640	1800	Continuous	Propulsion

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TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OUR LOW RATE OF EXCHANGE STOCK

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country's hake fishery provides a particularly pertinent example of how we will benefit if we work more closely with our neighbours.

Hake is our most valuable fishery, accounting for over 50 percent of the wealth generated from South Africa's living marine resources.

The situation in Namibia is very similar, with the hake fishery earning foreign exchange and providing thousands of jobs. At this stage, our scientists are pretty certain that we don't share a stock of shallow water hake (*Merluccius capensis*) with Namibia, but they are coming up with increasingly convincing evidence which suggests that the larger, deep-water stock (*Merluccius paradoxus*) is shared.

Therefore, if the fishing industries of South Africa or Namibia catch hake irresponsibly,

there is the potential for the mismanagement of hake to be felt on both sides of the Orange River, with devastating economic impacts for both countries.

The fact that scientists and fisheries managers in the two countries are talking to each other about the potential for managing the hake stock collectively is good for both countries.

The planned Benguela Current Commission will formalise these discussions and take them to another level so the countries can engage more meaningfully on issues like shared fish stocks and environmental protection.

Yet there are, I believe, other benefits to be gained from working more closely with our neighbours in the Benguela. For example, our country is seriously short of well trained and experienced marine scientists.

But over the past five years, the BCLME Programme has provided resources (eg research ships and scientific expertise) and we have been able to extend our research interests and look more closely at questions like the migratory behaviour of hake.

Transboundary research cruises have given some of our scientists the opportunity to work with researchers from neighbouring countries, as well as developed nations such as Norway, and debate their findings at workshops and symposia.

I believe that multinational programmes like the BCLME Programme provide us with the opportunity to broaden our horizons and learn, not only from our neighbours, but also from the international scientists who come to the Benguela to study this remarkable system.

South Africa's involvement in the BCLME Programme, and its anticipated role in the Benguela Current Commission will undoubtedly benefit our country into the future. Already, the developers of a large marine ecosystem programme for the east coast of Africa (the Agulhas and Somali Currents) are looking to replicate the successes of the BCLME Programme on the other side of the African continent.

Our experience with the cooperative management of the Benguela region will allow us to play a leading role in that process.

