

# First BCLME projects to start in July

by Maggi Barnard

The first contracts of the multi-million dollar joint programme on Namibia, South Africa and Angola's marine resources and ecosystem will be issued by July.

The first of the programme's almost 80 projects were advertised in regional newspapers recently. The three countries joined forces last year in the R425.7 million Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem (BCLME) initiative to address the transboundary situation between the three countries where fisheries have become an economic mainstay providing an important source of livelihoods in the region.

According to Dr Michael O'Toole, chief technical advisor of BCLME, it is an all encompassing programme with projects focusing on a broad range of activities.

These include an early warning systems for climate change, the monitoring and management of shared fish stocks, oil pollution and littering from ships and oil rigs offshore, the effect of algal blooms (sulphur eruptions) on the quality of fish stocks, the effects or

impacts of intensive diamond mining on the ecosystem, as well as gas and oil exploration, marine biodiversity and the protection of fauna and flora in marine life, and areas where ecotourism could be promoted to create jobs for coastal communities.

These type of projects used to be very specie or country specific. It was only in 1992 at the Rio Summit that a move was made to ecosystem-based projects called large marine ecosystems (LMEs). The Global Environment Facility (GEF) has since identified 64 LMEs world-wide, of which 12 are up and running and another eight are in preparation stage.

The BCLME was the first one dealing with an upwelling system that was approved by the GEF for funding (GEF contributed N\$167 million to the programme). The Benguela system is one of four main upwelling systems in the

world. The other three are the Canary current (northwest Africa), Chile-Peru current and the California current.

Ken Sherman of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association (NOAA) in the United States said at a meeting at Swakopmund in March that the BCLME showed the most promise of all the LMEs. He said internationally it was regarded as the flagship of ocean management.

According to O'Toole Namibia and in particular the minister of fisheries and marine resources, Abraham Iyambo, played a major role in getting funding for the BCLME and the programme off the ground.

With the BCLME head office situated in Windhoek, O'Toole said Namibia was in the driving seat of the programme.

According to him preference would be given to scientists in the region for the projects on tender. "We would also link in with the fisheries institutes of the three countries and their universities."

The Benguela Environmental Fisheries Interaction and Training (Benefit) Programme at Swakopmund will serve as the scientific wing of BCLME. The BCLME programme, which is a year old, will run for another four years. "If we are successful we might get another five years of funding. It all depends on how we deliver on our strategic plan," O'Toole said.