

REPORT DETAILS HORRIFIC SCALE OF SLAUGHTER

Longline fishing's deadly harvest

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IN A shocking report released yesterday, it was revealed that 33 850 seabirds, 4 200 sea turtles and more than seven million sharks are killed every year on the hooks of longline fishing vessels off the west coast of South Africa, Namibia and Angola.

The report was released by Birdlife South Africa and WWF-South Africa, the first time an assessment has been made of the effect of longline fishing on these three vulnerable creatures in the Benguela Current ecosystem.

Most of albatross and sea turtles killed on the fish hooks are listed as threatened species, and many of the shark species are also threatened.

Samantha Petersen, manager of the Birdlife and the WWF Responsible Fisheries Programme, said yesterday the survey had taken three years and looked at the impact of pelagic longlining, where lines were set close to the ocean surface, and demersal longlining, where lines were set on the bottom of the ocean.

"Turtles, seabirds and sharks all have similar life history characteristics. They grow slowly and breed slowly. The wandering albatross lays one egg every two years, so they don't have the ability to recover, unlike many fish species. They also move over great distances and come into contact with a number of fisheries from many countries, so



HOOKED: These shy albatross are just a few of the thousands of seabirds that were drowned on the hooks of longlining fishing vessels. Thousands of sea turtles and millions of sharks also die on the hooks every year. *Picture: SOPHIA STANDER*

this is not a problem that one country can solve," she said.

The study area was restricted to the Benguela Current ecosystem from Cape Town north to Angola.

South Africa undertook at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 to implement an ecosystem approach to sea fisheries by 2010. This ensures that an

entire marine ecosystem is healthy, rather than only certain commercially exploited fish stocks.

The figures for deaths of seabirds, turtles and sharks represent "an absolute minimum" as there was very little data available from Angola.

Of the seabirds killed, about 500 were killed by South African longliners and 30 850

by Namibian longliners.

Petersen said the discrepancy was the combination of Namibia having no regulations to reduce bycatch and that there were so many more Namibian longliners at sea.

Sea turtles caught include the critically endangered leatherback turtle.

The report also provides recommendations on how to

reduce the impact of longlining.

Deon Nel, WWF Aquatic Unit Manager, said the report was not about pointing fingers, but about helping to build a more responsible fishery.

Johann Augustyn, of Marine and Coastal Management, said in response to the report: "As government, we'll take these recommendations seriously."

