

# Longline fishing kills 34 000 seabirds a year – report

By **MELANIE GOSLING**

CAPE TOWN – In a shocking report released yesterday, it was revealed that 33 850 seabirds, 4 200 marine 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, released by Birdlife South Africa and WWF South Africa, was the first assessment of the effect of longline fishing on these three vulnerable creatures in the Benguela current ecosystem. Most of the albatross and turtles killed by fish hooks are listed by the World Conservation Union as threatened species. Many of the

shark species are also threatened.

Samantha Petersen, manager of the Birdlife and WWF Responsible Fisheries Programme, said yesterday the survey had taken three years and looked at the effect 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 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 deaths of seabirds, turtles and sharks represent “an absolute minimum” as there was little data available from Angola.