

# Marine Experts Discuss Ocean Changes

By Surihe Gaomas

**SWAKOPMUND** – The reduction of pelagic fish stocks experienced 11 years ago as a result of the Benguela El Nino phenomenon is still haunting Namibian deep waters and marine resources today.

Even though this phase has passed, both Namibia and Angola have not recovered enough to realise the high levels of fish resources they used to experience in the early 1960s. Records show that Namibia had a rich supply of pelagic fish where the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) went up to 1.4 million tonnes in the late 1980s, but this dropped to zero, while in 1995 it rose to 1 000 tonnes only.

In 2002, the Minister of Fisheries Dr Abraham Iyambo declared a zero TAC to allow the recovery of fish stocks, bringing the fishing sector's operations to a snail's pace.

The catastrophic impact of the low oxygen level coupled with the major El Nino effect on the marine resources, yesterday brought together various local and international scien-

tists and experts in the marine world at the coastal town of Swakopmund to determine the state of the ocean and the way forward.

The event allows experts to have a much better understanding of the changing physical, biological and chemical oceanography of the sea, which would further aid in mitigating severe losses of marine life as experienced in the years of 1994 and 1995.

At the two-day Angola-Benguela Regional Front Workshop, participants expressed alarm at the decline in the biomass of fisheries over the years as a result of the heavy exploitation of foreign fleets and impacts on the ocean environment along the Namibian and Angolan coastline.

Officially opening the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem Programme (BCLME) Angola-Benguela Front Workshop yesterday, Deputy Minister of Fisheries Kilus Nguvauva on behalf of the Minister of Fisheries said that in 1994 environmental conditions of the sea waters were very poor, in-

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*Deputy Minister of Fisheries Kilus Nguvauva in conversation with founding Researcher of the BCLME Mike O'Toole before the start of the two-day Angola-Benguela Regional Front Workshop in Swakopmund yesterday.*

# Ocean

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vaded by low oxygen water, extensive outbreaks of harmful algal blooms and sulphur eruptions along the coast.

This ultimately resulted in the high mortalities of young hake, pilchard and horse-mackerel.

"An estimated two billion juvenile hake were trapped by the low-oxygen, water-rich in hydrogen sulphide in the inshore nursery grounds and suffocated," said Nguvauva.

During that period, 300 000 seals died of starvation and both Namibia and Angola, which share the Benguela Current, experienced major low fish stocks in the marine ecosystems. Such a scenario caused serious consequences for the fishing industry and the Namibian economy.

The deputy minister stressed the need for urgent establishment of a "cost-effective early warning system" in order to monitor such events with accurate and reliable data on the ocean climate and subsequent effects on the fisheries sector.

"Strategic planning and the development and testing of scenarios need to be carried out in order to mitigate the impacts of the global climate change on the BCLME and its fisheries re-

sources," explained Nguvauva. This in turn should be coupled with capacity building of human resources like training young scientists from Namibia, Angola and South Africa who can critically analyse the ocean's future sustainability more effectively.

"A shortage of skilled expertise in applied fisheries, analytical science and modelling is a serious gap that needs to be urgently addressed if we are to adopt the ecosystem approach to management and use effective adaptive strategies under increasing environmental uncertainty," he added. Over the last decade, warming of the sea surface water and its rather different smell has also resulted in some fish stocks floating dead on the surface due to lack of oxygen in the marine ecosystem.

Citing this as a concern, Dr Mick O'Toole said that the effects of the 10-year cycle of the Benguela El Nino experienced along the western coastline bordering Namibia, Angola and South Africa led to "nutrient poor water, low phytoplankton, very low recruitment and dead fish being washed up on shore."

Furthermore, the shifting of the tropical system southwards is causing the warm water to lessen hake growth and leading to decline of the African Penguin, as well as other bird species on Ichaboe Island at Lüderitz. In 1994 the numbers of fur seals also plummeted from 220 000 to 100 000 but then slowly recovered, unlike marine life that remains on the low. O'Toole said, "Even after a moratorium was set up years ago, the country has never regained its former biomass." Further research shows that the lack of oxygen has culminated in a lot of toxic gases like sulphide, ammonium and nitrate, which practically kill the fish stocks. In relation to this, Chris Reason of the University of Cape Town said, "Because of these less productive water conditions the survival of the fish larvae becomes less and are repressed. The fish ultimately gets trapped in a predator pit."

Meanwhile, Namibia's neighbour Angola whose population highly depends on pelagic fish also experienced a decline in its sea resources. Although Angola experienced this situation slightly, they still allow Namibian vessels to catch in their waters.

The pelagic fleet in 1996 stood at 42 vessels and it declined to 16 in 2004.

General Director of the Institute of Fisheries Research and representative of the Angola BCLME Francisca Delgado said that the warm and cold merging of the seawater due to the Benguela Front had great impact on the distribution and availability of the marine living resources.

"In the last five years the pelagic resources in the northern Benguela is showing a declining trend on the abundance and growth that has a socio-economic impact for Angola and Namibia," said Delgado.

At the end of the two-day workshop, the experts will again sit for another three days for the

Benguela Environment Fisheries Interaction and Training Programme (BENEFIT) to deliberate on regional developments, tabling reports on the status of the Benguela current commissions and its implications as well as recent developments South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (SEAFO).

## Ethics

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own is denial of services to the public.

Apart from looking at corporate ethics, the conference is expected to give people in management positions a better understanding of the essential question regarding financing, disclosure and succession. It will also look at planning, compensation and litigation, among other issues.

Amongst prominent speakers that yesterday addressed the conference was Chief Editor and Convener of the King Report on Corporate Governance, Phillip Armstrong, who spoke on the connection between corruption and corporate governance. He indicated that corruption is not only a moral problem but also a fundamental obstacle to development.

Regarding the popular definition of "abuse of public office for private gain", Armstrong says this is too narrow a definition as private firms often share responsibility in corrupt deals.

Corruption, he added, has indeed become an issue of concern not only in Namibia but also beyond as it acts as a barrier to economic development, which in the long run undermines overall development, consequently hitting hard on the poor. Further, corruption diminishes the productive use of national assets and discourages investment locally, not excluding the deterring of foreign interest.

Though "not a one size fits all" response, Armstrong suggests that on the supply side, the only way to fight some of these corrupt practices would be by instituting sound corporate governance systems, controls and procedures. At the demand level, he recommends the streamlining and simplifying of laws and regulations.

The conference aims at promoting good corporate governance in both the public and private sectors, engaging stakeholders in a national debate about what contributes to good corporate governance and creating awareness about good corporate governance in society. The conference is expected to provide an opportunity for executives, managers and lead-

ers in various disciplines learn and network about the best practices and emerging trends in corporate governance.

Tonata Shiimi, co-director of the conference last week to the press that the conference would add impetus to the many things that have been happening to bring the issues of corruption and good corporate governance to the fore. In addition to the already mentioned topics under discussion, matters such as how to spot early warning signs of mismanagement problems, the role of the media in promoting good corporate ethics, morality, spirituality and good corporate governance, a firmative action and its implications on good corporate governance as well as the legal firmity and academics' contribution to good corporate governance will also be looked at.

Partners in the conference which is jointly hosted by A Investment Holdings and the Centre for Training and Projects Development, include the offices of the President and Prime Minister, the Anti-Corruption Commission, NID and Transparency International.

The conference ends tomorrow.

## Cries

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Namandje claims that he also raised the issue with the magistrate in court and later in chambers in the presence of Hinda and prosecutor Petrus Grusharber. Namandje further noted that in the magistrate's chambers, Mahali pointed out to him that the inquest is about "healing the wounds of the late Kandara's family" and did not see the need for Sheehama to be represented by a legal practitioner and for witnesses to be subjected to questioning by representatives of

Sheehama. Namandje in his affidavit stated that Hinda, after discussing the matter for almost 10 minutes, submitted to Mahali that he could only represent Sheehama by way of a watch brief without being robed and without participating in any way.

Another issue raised by the applicants is that while they were not allowed to be present in court while other witnesses were giving evidence, Hinda, who was also a witness was allowed to sit in.

In his affidavit, Namandje submits: "When I then returned to court, Mr Hinda was then called by the first respondent (Magistrate Mahali), as the first witness on that day. After finishing testifying and being led by

the first respondent and later in brief respects by the prosecutor Mr Hinda was excused as a witness and immediately thereafter as I recall, robed to assume another roll as legal representative of the deceased's family."

It also emerged from Namandje's affidavit that Mahali wanted to recuse herself from the matter after brief closed-door consultations between herself and Chief Magistrate Sarel Jacob and Grusharber, but was advised against that "by others that it may be irregular for her to do so as she had already ruled on the point that she will not recuse herself".

The inquest hearing has been postponed pending the outcome of the High Court application.



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