



# NEW ERA



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# Marine Sector on Alert

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**SWAKOPMUND – Namibia and its neighbour Angola have to introduce better research mechanisms to make proper predictions in light of a looming Benguela Nino which brought some devastation to the Atlantic Ocean since 1994/1995.**

Fears are that with the signs of upwelling of warmer seawaters from the north, carrying with it low salinity and lack of oxygen that have already depleted the pelagic fish stocks, it is predicted that this could lead to another Benguela Nino event with the intensity that was experienced

in 1984 and again in 1994/1995.

“The consequences will be devastating and with only 50 000 pilchards in the water another Nino event will bring it close to a zero biomass,” said local scientist Graca D’Almeida of the National Marine Information and Research Centre. Furthermore, the lack of quantifying data about the underlying marine life makes it a cumbersome task for experts to determine fully whether or not these are signs of a Benguela Nino event. “The phenomenon is building up or delayed. Angola experienced a torrential rainfall with a dry spell in the central and south with extremely hot temperatures and notable reduced quality of catchments of fish at Namibe,” said Michel Morais, an expert from the University of Angola.

In view of this situation, the fishing industry has to be



*Dr Mick O'Toole of BCLME addressing the scientists and oceanographers in Swakopmund.*

more adaptable to changes to prevent future weather phenomenon scenarios. By the end of yesterday afternoon, oceanographers and scientists

openly deliberated on prevention measures that might save the fishing industry from unforeseen events in the ocean.

However, as the discussions progressed, it turned out that oceanographers had also picked up inter-tidal signals on the rocky shore of Namibia, bringing in totally different species which have migrated from the northern Benguela Front.

Dr Neville Sweijd of the Benguela Environment Fisheries Interaction and Training Programme, or BENEFIT Forum, noted however that with these conditions it becomes predictable that there are signs of “build up” to such a weather phenomenon that may have adverse effects in killing fish stocks and marine life, as happened a decade ago.

This could virtually wipe out more fish stocks and the ecosystem than in 1998. “There’s a big bubble of hot



*Dr Neville Sweijd of the Benguela Environment Fisheries Interaction and Training Programme (BENEFIT).*

anoxic water threatening to come down to Namibia,” added Dr Sweijd.

It is against this worrying

scenario that the over 70 oceanographers and scientists are tentatively coming up with recommendations that could save the fishing sector from going under. This document will later be handed over to the Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources upon completion, in order to serve as a guiding tool on the way forward for the fishing industry.

This time around the scientists do not want to be caught off guard as what happened in 1994/1995 when the Minister of Fisheries Dr Abraham Iyambo asked them why he was not informed about these events on time.

“I will always remember the Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources Abraham Iyambo asking us at the time why nobody warned him about these events,” said Dr Mick O’Toole of BCLME in

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# Marine

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his welcoming address on Monday.

Researchers already have in place monitoring systems about the migration southwards movement of cold-water species like juvenile and adult fish. It was understood during the sessions that the famous Angolan Sardinellas was landed by Namibian fishermen recently.

Towards the end of the Angola-Benguela Front Workshop recommendations were made about putting in place effective tidal gauge records, vertical measurements of sub-surface observation and proxy data.

The meteorological observations have to improve their predictions by the right people to make the interpretations, thereby improving on predictability well in advance. The scientists must however ask to be well informed about the biological indicators.

At the end of the workshop, Dr O'Toole informed the *New Era* team that the two days of deliberations were productive and served to bring the trans-boundary issues and recommendations of the two countries together. Once the final report is finalised it will be used by both the Namibian and Angolan governments for meaningful planning and joint research.

The main recommendations include capacity building, eco-tourism, increased collaboration, data sharing and ongoing monitoring procedures.

Today marks the start of yet another workshop where country reports will be presented, on regional developments and other scientific programmes.

The "Annual BENEFIT Forum", which starts today ends on Friday in Swakopmund.