

Regional plan for fisheries gets under way

BY MELANIE GOSLING

A plan to reduce the impact of commercial fishing fleets within Southern Africa's so-called Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem has been launched.

Described as cutting-edge fisheries management, the plan – the result of several years' research and consultation in South Africa, Namibia and Angola – was launched in Cape Town yesterday by the WWF conservation body and the BCLME programme.

The underlying concept of the plan is to move away from the traditional practice of managing single marine species in isolation from the rest of the marine system.

The new system, called the "ecosystem approach to fisheries", advocates managing the marine system as a whole, not only those parts which are commercially valuable.

The approach seeks to reduce the impact of commercial fishing on other parts of the marine ecosystem, some of which have been hammered by bad fishing practices.

The plan seeks to balance the diverse needs of different sectors of society who seek benefits from the marine environment.

It provides 22 objectives which fisheries managers will have to consider if they implement this new approach to fishing.

The Benguela Current Commission, which at this stage acts as an advisory body to the ministers responsible for fisheries in South Africa, Namibia and Angola, will take the blueprint forward by translating it into recommendations for the three countries.

Within five years the commission is likely to become an international convention, which will make the recommendations binding.

The plan will help the three countries to achieve their goals – agreed to at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 – of implementing an ecosystem approach to fisheries by 2012.

This comes after the first ministerial meeting of the three countries in Windhoek last week, attended by Environment Minister Marthinus van Schalkwyk, where the three regional ministers approved the science plan for the Benguela Current Commission.

Johann Augustyn of the Department of Environment's Marine and Coastal Management said at the launch that the plan was "not just a paper exercise".

"There is a lot of momentum for this, which will be taken forward by the Benguela Marine Commission. It will be important to translate this initiative into a national issue. It is a cutting-edge scientific initiative which is stirring up a lot of interest internationally and which will provide a model for other ecosystems in years to come."

It will help three countries achieve their ambitions

