



## BCLME programme encourages regional co-operation

Angola, Namibia and South Africa are already conducting joint stock assessment surveys of hake and pilchard and in the next five years the three countries will establish a regional authority to provide advice on the transboundary management of shared fish stocks.

The move by the three countries towards greater co-operation in the field of fisheries management has been facilitated by the establishment of the Benguela current large marine ecosystem (BCLME) programme, a regional initiative that is supported by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

The establishment of an Interim Benguela Current Commission (IBCC) is one of the major objectives of the BCLME programme.

It is anticipated that the IBCC will complement the work of the South East Atlantic Fisheries Organisation (SEAFO) and ICCAT, regional fisheries organisations that regulate the high seas and tuna fisheries in the Benguela region.

The GEF has contributed \$15.2 million to the BCLME programme, complementing an investment of approximately \$16 million by the three countries and a further \$7 million from other sources.

The area of interest for the BCLME programme stretches from just east of Port Elizabeth in South Africa (20°E), to Cabinda Province in Angola (5°E), thereby including the full length of Namibia and Angola's coastline.

The BCLME programme is aimed at improving the capabilities of Angola, Namibia and South Africa to manage marine resources and address environmental problems that occur across the national boundaries, in order that the Benguela ecosystem may be sustainably managed as a whole. Marine scientists from the three countries have been working together since 1995, through the Benguela Environment Fisheries Interaction and Training programme (BENEFIT), which is focused on research into the major shared fish resources of the region and the profound influence that environmental variability has on the productivity and distribution of these stocks. However, the scope of the BCLME programme is much wider than BENEFIT because it includes both renewable and non-renewable resources, such as minerals, coastal development, pollution and biodiversity issues and primarily addresses transboundary management and monitoring issues rather than marine scientific research.

### Focus on Cape hakes

According to the co-ordinator of the BCLME programme, Dr Mick O'Toole,

one of the programme's key interventions has been to encourage Angola, Namibia and South Africa to undertake joint assessments of shared stocks. Joint surveys using local research vessels and the Norwegian *Dr Fridtjof Nansen* have already been completed and the foundations for further co-operation will be laid later this year when scientists will begin to develop

operational management procedures (OMPs) for the transboundary hake stocks in the Benguela region.

The Cape hakes (*Merluccius paradoxus* and *capensis*) are shared stocks between Namibia and South Africa and to a lesser extent, Angola, but are assessed and managed separately. A three-year project which is to be funded by the BCLME programme will assess the ways in which the hake OMPs in Namibia and South Africa may be harmonised. It is expected that the project will address technical issues such as fishing gear, mesh size and the compatibility of assessment methodologies. An important component of this project is the training of stock assessment scientists in Angola, Namibia and South Africa.

The Cape hakes are harvested largely through bottom trawling and to a lesser extent, by longline vessels operating in Namibia and South Africa. Longliners tend to catch large, adult female hakes, while trawlers also take medium to small sizes. In addition, longliners are able to fish in rough areas that are inaccessible to trawlers. While longliners are labour-intensive at sea and produce a higher value product, the trawl industry is more labour intensive on land where value is added to hake products. The optimal harvesting ratio of these two very different fisheries is currently unknown, and the BCLME programme aims to address this by funding a study to determine how the maximum socio-economic value may be extracted from hake resources in both countries, while at the same time ensuring the long-term sustainability of hake stocks in the Benguela region.

According to O'Toole, over the next four years an estimated 80 projects will be supported by the BCLME programme, with the aim of developing baseline scientific and economic information on what is known about the Benguela ecosystem, how this is changing over time and how the transboundary management problems associated with fishing, mining, oil exploration, coastal development, biodiversity and pollution can best be addressed across the entire Benguela region.

The BCLME programme makes provision for the establishment of a self-sustaining, permanent Benguela Current Commission (BCC) which will develop the regional managerial infrastructure, at a political and technical level, to manage the Benguela ecosystem as a whole. The BCC will be negotiated between the three participating countries and is scheduled to become a fully functioning commission, with a supporting secretariat, by 2007.

(Photo: Dept. of Environmental Affairs and Tourism)



A South African vessel purse seines for pilchards off Cape Town. South Africa, Namibia and Angola are already conducting joint stock assessment surveys for hake and pilchards.