Treaty safeguarding sea environment is due in December

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SA, NAMIBIA and Angola are hoping to ratify a convention between them next year to protect the Benguela Current environment and ecosystems, Benguela Current Commission executive secretary Hashali Hamukuaya said yesterday.

The convention has implications for the fishing, marine mining (diamonds) and oil and gas industries and means that the three countries will increasingly work together to manage these industries in an environmentally sustainable way.

The convention was established to help the three states restore, maintain and conserve the biological integrity of the Benguela Current large marine ecosystem, which stretches from Port Elizabeth in the south to the Angolan province of Cabinda in the north.

Mr Hamukuaya said a commission meeting at the weekend, in which SA's Water and Environment Minister Edna Molewa participated, had resolved to ratify the convention "not later than December 2012".

Ministers from the three countries were studying the draft convention with the aim of having it signed by August, to give enough time for its ratification, Mr Hamukuaya said.

Repeated phone calls to three Department of Water and Environment Affairs officials went unanswered yesterday.

"The aim is conservation, so that what we have is used sustainably so we don't deplete these resources," Mr Hamukuaya said.

It had been proven by experience that the only way to manage resources such as fish was to do so holistically, or one country's good management practices could be undermined by another country's poor effort, he said.

The ecosystem is considered to be one of the most productive in the world and supports important economic activities, including Angola's gas and oil fields and the hake stocks that range from southern Angola to Port Elizabeth and are an important export commodity for SA and Namibia.

Namibia's quota for hake, for the 2010-11 season was 140 000 tons, according to the country's Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources. It was estimated the income to the state from this would amount to N$75,5m, SA's total allowable catch, at 132 000 tons would be at its highest level since 2007 but a little down on levels of more than 150 000 in 2005 and 2006, according to research by Sasfin Securities. No value was given.

The convention would govern how the three countries would monitor the control and surveillance of these important commodities, Mr Hamukuaya said.

The countries would also work towards "harmonising" their mining and mining exploration laws to protect the ecosystem environmentally, he said.

This year's Angola Oil & Gas Report from Business Monitor International forecasts that the country will account for 4.88% of African regional oil demand by 2015, while providing 19.66% of supply. With regard to natural gas, last year the region consumed an estimated 123.4-billion cubic metres, with demand of 175.9bcm forecast for 2015.

An estimated 219.5bcm was produced for last year and should rise to 322.6bcm in 2015.
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