The Honourable Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Bernard Esau, will open the fourth Science Forum of the Benguela Current Commission (BCC) in Windhoek on Monday 15 October.

The Science Forum is an annual event that attracts marine and fisheries scientists from around the world. The Forum provides an opportunity for scientists from the marine research institutes and universities of Angola, Namibia and South Africa (the three members states of the BCC), to report on their work and, in consultation with their peers, evaluate their progress. It also provides an opportunity for scientists from the region to identify areas of mutual scientific interest and discuss collaboration with their international colleagues.

Professor Hein Rune Skjoldal of the Norwegian Institute of Marine Research (IMR) will deliver the keynote address. The IMR is Norway’s largest centre of marine science. Its main task is to provide advice to Norwegian authorities on aquaculture and fisheries, but the institute is heavily engaged in development activities; as such, ties between IMR and the Benguela region were forged well over two decades ago.

At this year’s Science Forum, scientists will report back on a number of projects that are being implemented in the Benguela region. The projects cover six broad thematic areas including the ecosystem approach to fisheries; living marine resources research and management; biodiversity and ecosystem health; water quality and pollution; oceanographic and coastal monitoring; and data and information management. They are implemented by scientists working for Angola’s Institute of Fisheries Research (INIP) and the Institute of Artisanal Fisheries (IPA); Namibia’s National Marine and Information Research Centre (NatMIRC); and South Africa’s departments of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries and Environmental Affairs.

According to Dr Hashali Hamukuaya, Executive Secretary of the BCC, the scientific research carried out by the BCC will culminate in new policies, legislation and management practices to guarantee the future sustainability of fisheries and the associated environment of the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem or BCLME.

“One of the goals of the BCC is to provide the governments of the participating countries with the best available information and expert advice concerning the use and development of the BCLME,” said Dr Hamukuaya. “The Science Programme, which is implemented by scientists from the national institutions of the three countries is helping us to achieve this goal.”

The Science Programme of the BCC is managed by an Ecosystem Advisory Committee which ensures that scientific investigations are based on priority areas and respond to urgent information and data needs. Implementation of the Science Programme is generously funded by the government of Norway, while the European Union has provided additional funding for stock assessment through a project known as ECOFISH.

Scientific investigation is one of the key activities of the BCC, which is working with Angola, Namibia and South Africa to introduce an ecosystem approach to the management of the BCLME.

Over the past two years, the BCC has focused on the drafting of a legally binding, multilateral Benguela Current Convention that will formalise and entrench the BCC.
Once it is ratified, the Convention will commit Angola, Namibia and South Africa to:

» Preventing and eliminating pollution and taking steps to protect the marine ecosystem against any adverse impacts;
» undertaking environmental impact assessments for activities that might have negative impacts on the marine and coastal environment;
» collecting, sharing and exchanging data;
» where possible, reversing and preventing habitat alteration and destruction;
» protecting vulnerable species and biological integrity;
» improving human capacity and infrastructure.

In essence, the Benguela Current Convention captures the countries’ intention to conserve and manage the BCLME jointly, for the benefit of present and future generations.

The annual Science Forum of the BCC takes place from 15 to 18 October at the Safari Court Hotel, Windhoek. Members of the media are invited to attend the opening ceremony which takes place on Monday 15 October at 09h00. For logistical arrangements please contact Petrina Mutumbulua on 081 314763.

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