The Benguela Current Convention

1. What is the Benguela Current Convention?

It is a formal, written treaty, or agreement between the governments of Angola, Namibia and South Africa ("the Parties"). The Convention can be loosely compared to a contract between the three countries; it sets out their willingness to assume a range of obligations.

2. What is the objective of the Benguela Current Convention?

The objective of the Benguela Current Convention is set out in the text of the treaty which reads:

“The objective of the Benguela Current Convention is to promote a coordinated regional approach to the long-term conservation, protection, rehabilitation, enhancement and sustainable use of the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem, to provide economic, environmental and social benefits.”

The word "coordinated" conveys the Parties' intention to work together towards the same goal, while the words "long-term" capture their commitment to do so into the future.

3. What are the main areas of interest for the Benguela Current Convention?

These are captured by the general principles of the Convention:

“In giving effect to the objective of this Convention and to the principles in paragraph (1), the Parties shall:

(a) take all possible steps to prevent, abate and minimise pollution and take the necessary measures to protect the marine ecosystem against any adverse impacts;

(b) undertake environmental impact assessment for proposed activities that are likely to cause adverse impacts on the marine and coastal environments;

(c) apply management measures based on the best scientific evidence available;

(d) establish mechanisms for intersectoral data collection, sharing and exchange thereof;

(e) where possible, reverse and prevent habitat alteration and destruction;

(f) protect vulnerable species and biological diversity; and

(g) take all possible steps to strengthen and maintain human and infrastructural capacity.”

4. What is the Benguela Current Commission and what role does it play?

The Benguela Current Commission (BCC) was established in 2007, following the signing of an Interim Agreement by Angola, Namibia and South Africa. The BCC is the vehicle or platform through which the Parties cooperate. It is administered by a Secretariat based in Swakopmund, Namibia.
5. How are decisions taken?

Decisions and recommendations are taken by consensus.

The Ministerial Conference is the highest policy and decision-making body of the Benguela Current Commission. It consists of national delegations from Angola, Namibia and South Africa, led by a minister.

The Management Board coordinates and advances the common interests of the three countries. It consists of national delegations from each of the participating countries. Usually, there are representatives from each of the relevant ministries (e.g. the fisheries, mines or minerals, transport and environment ministries) in each of the national delegations.

The Ecosystem Advisory Committee supports decision-making by providing the Management Board and the Ministerial Conference with the best available scientific, management and legal information and advice.

The Working Groups provide a platform for the scientists and managers in the national institutions to manage joint programmes and activities.

6. How is the Benguela Current Commission funded?

Angola, Namibia and South Africa contribute in equal proportions to the budget of the Benguela Current Commission.

Support for the activities of the Commission is sought from national, regional and international sponsors. For example, the Global Environment Facility (GEF), in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has supported the establishment and building of the Benguela Current Commission as an institution; the government of Norway is supporting a comprehensive Science Programme; the government of Iceland has supported a Training and Capacity Building Programme; and the European Union is supporting the ECOFISH activity which is seeking to improve the assessment and management of commercially important fish stocks.

7. When does the Benguela Current Convention come into force?

Once the Benguela Current Commission is signed by ministers representing each of the Parties, the process of ratification begins. Each country will review the text of the Convention, make sure it is consistent with national laws and policies and then present it to their heads of state for signature. The Benguela Current Convention will come into force 30 days after it is ratified by each Party.

For more information about the Benguela Current Commission, please visit www.benguelacc.org