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## Two decades of inter-governmental collaboration: Three developing countries on the move towards ecosystem-based governance in the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem



Victoria de Barros Neto<sup>a</sup>, Maria de Fátima Jardim<sup>b</sup>,  
 José Maria Botelho de Vasconcelos<sup>c</sup>, Augusto da Silva Tomás<sup>d</sup>,  
 Alpheus !Naruseb<sup>f</sup>, Bernard Esau<sup>e</sup>, Obeth Kandjoze<sup>g</sup>, Pohamba Shifeta<sup>h</sup>,  
 Dipuo Peters<sup>i</sup>, Edna Molewa<sup>j</sup>, Mosebenzi Joseph Zwane<sup>k</sup>, Senzeni Zokwana<sup>l</sup>,  
 Hashali Hamukuaya<sup>m,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Minister of Fisheries, Avenida 4 de Fevereiro No. 30, Edifício Atlântico, Luanda, Angola

<sup>b</sup> Minister of Environment, Rua dos Enganos, No. 5, Torre Zimbo, Luanda, Angola

<sup>c</sup> Minister of Petroleum, Avenida 4 de Fevereiro 105, Luanda, Angola

<sup>d</sup> Minister of Transport, Avenida 4 de Fevereiro, 42–7 Andar, Luanda, Angola

<sup>e</sup> Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda Street, Windhoek, Namibia

<sup>f</sup> Minister of Works and Transport, 6719 Bell Street, Snyman Circle, Windhoek, Namibia

<sup>g</sup> Minister of Mines and Energy, 1 Aviation Road, Windhoek, Namibia

<sup>h</sup> Minister of Environment and Tourism, Dr. Kenneth Kaunda Street, Windhoek, Namibia

<sup>i</sup> Minister of Transport, 159 Forum Building, CNR Bosman and Struben Street, Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>j</sup> Minister of Environmental Affairs, 473 Steve Biko Street, Arcadia, Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>k</sup> Minister of Mineral Resources, 70 Meintjies Street, Travenna Campus, Sunnyside, Arcadia, Pretoria South Africa

<sup>l</sup> Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries, 20 Steve Biko Street, Arcadia, Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>m</sup> Executive Secretary, Benguela Current Commission, Swakopmund, Namibia

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### ABSTRACT

With strong political will, the three coastal states of Angola, Namibia and South Africa have demonstrated that sustainable development of the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem (BCLME) is feasible. In this context, the three member states of the Benguela Current Commission have adopted a multi-sectorial LME approach for ensuring long-term conservation while balancing social, economic and environmental benefits.

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## 1. Introduction

This viewpoint highlights the achievements of Angola, Namibia and South Africa, three southern African countries that have collaborated on ocean science and management over the past two decades. The governments of our countries are convinced that an ecosystem-based, multi-sectorial approach to ocean governance is the best available option for achieving sustainable development, as defined by the World Commission on Environment (United Nations, 1987), in the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem (BCLME).

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [hashali@benguelacc.org](mailto:hashali@benguelacc.org) (H. Hamukuaya).

As decision-makers, we are fully aware of the richness and complexity of the BCLME, its biological and physical functioning, its significance for the socio-economic development and livelihoods of the people who depend on it, and the wide range of issues and problems that threaten it. This is precisely what motivated us to sign the Interim Agreement on the Establishment of the Benguela Current Commission which was achieved by January 2007.

Then, in March 2013, our countries proudly ushered in a new era of collaboration when we signed the Benguela Current Convention – the first formal LME framework in the world ([Benguela Current Convention, 2013](#)). The convention was ratified by July 2014; it mandates the three countries to promote the long-term conservation, protection, rehabilitation, enhancement and sustainable use of the BCLME and thereby bring long-term social and economic benefits to the people of the region. The Convention is the culmination of many years of research, consultation and negotiation, and in ratifying it, the three States demonstrated their commitment to the sustainable development of their countries and to work together constructively and peacefully to ensure that shared marine resources are managed in a sustainable and integrated way for the benefit of present and future generations.

Our countries have each signed conventions and agreements that are concerned with the conservation and management of marine resources; the abatement of pollution; avoiding adverse impacts on the marine environment; protecting biodiversity; maintaining the integrity of the marine ecosystem; and minimising the risk of long-term or irreversible effects by human activities. Acceding to these instruments demonstrates our commitment to their provisions. At a regional level we have ratified several instruments, including the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) sector-specific protocols (transport, fisheries, minerals and energy and environment) that have helped to facilitate cooperation. At the national level, each of our countries has enacted comprehensive and modern environmental legislation and we have demonstrated commitment to the effective long-term, integrated and sustainable management of marine resources.

The Benguela Current Commission is responsible for coordinating the partnership between the governments of Angola, Namibia and South Africa. The intergovernmental organisation is headed by a Ministerial Conference that consists of 12 ministers, four from each country representing the major ocean sectors and supported by the Commissioners (senior government officials) who together with the Secretariat implement the decisions of the Conference. The Secretariat is based in the coastal town of Swakopmund, Namibia. The Secretariat works with regional and international partners to coordinate research and capacity building programmes and to assist the committees that are responsible for providing scientific, management and financial advice. The Commission uses this science-based advice to make management decisions related to transboundary resources and issues, with the goal of ensuring the long-term sustainability of the BCLME and a balance between social, economic and environmental benefits.

## 2. Protecting and managing the BCLME

The BCLME is one of the most productive ocean areas in the world; it is particularly productive in terms of fisheries resources, but top predators such as seabirds and marine mammals are also abundant. Commercial fisheries and the extraction of non-living resources such as oil, gas, diamonds and other minerals, are the focus of industrial activities ([O'Toole et al., 2001](#)) It is estimated that coastal and marine resources contribute hundreds of billion dollars per year to the economies of Angola, Namibia and South Africa ([Sumaila, this issue](#)).

We recognise the immense environmental challenges we confront in our endeavours to manage the LME cooperatively and in an integrated and sustainable way and have taken a number of important strides towards addressing some of the most serious environmental issues. For instance, with regard to pollution – which is not extensive but still of concern to our governments because industrial activities are increasing in scale across the region – we have adopted regional oil spill contingency plans and enacted strict environmental laws to mitigate the impacts on the ecosystem. Equally, our governments have invested substantial resources to rebuild fish stocks so that, in time, they may be restored to levels that can produce maximum sustainable yields. We have adopted an ecosystem approach to fisheries management and implemented responsible fishing practices such as reducing by-catch, discards and other adverse ecosystem impacts and we are putting in place comprehensive management plans. Our governments have also invested heavily in monitoring, control and surveillance (MCS) with the purpose of combatting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU) activities within the exclusive economic zones (EEZs).

Some of the largest marine protected areas in Africa are found in the BCLME; these have been declared for the purpose of conserving vulnerable habitats and sensitive areas ([Currie et al., 2008](#); [Attwood et al., 2010](#)) and fulfilling national requirements and obligations to the World Summit on Sustainable Development ([United Nations, 2002, 2012](#)) and the Convention of Biological Diversity.

The countries of the BCLME recognise that correcting decades of over-exploitation of resources and fragmented management actions requires a substantial, coordinated effort and they are appreciative of the long-term support of a number of development partners. For example, the governments of Norway, Germany, Iceland; the Global Environment Facility and the United Nations Development Programme have supported the countries of the BCLME with funding and encouragement (some since the early 1990s) and the BCC continues to attract substantial support for its activities.

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