

More than 7-million sharks and skates are killed every year as an unintended consequence of longline fishing off the west coast of South Africa and the coasts of Namibia and Angola.

The practice also claims about 34 000 seabirds and 4 200 sea turtles a year in the area known as the Benguela Ecosystem, according to a report by environmental group WWF compiled in association with

Longline fishing decimating sealife

conservation body BirdLife. "The majority of albatross and sea turtle species and many shark species are listed as threatened with extinction by the IUCN (World Conservation Union), with fisheries impacts being cited as a major cause," said a statement released in Cape Town yesterday.

The creatures get caught on baited hooks put out on long lines by fishing boats. "The report shows us that the bycatch is substantial, it is a huge concern," Samantha Petersen, manager of the BirdLife and WWF Responsible Fisheries Programme, said. "But there is a lot of will to

resolve the issue, and there are win-win solutions." These included the use of bird-scaring lines – scarecrow-like ropes cast alongside fishing lines to stop albatrosses and other seabirds from diving onto baited hooks set by fishing vessels.

The use of such lines was

compulsory in SA, but compliance was low, Petersen said. WWF Sanlam Marine Programme manager Aaniyah Omandien said such steps not only helped preserve fragile ecosystems, but also benefited fishermen by saving time on unhooking unintended catches, reducing damage to fishing gear and minimising bait loss. "It is better for everybody if we can succeed in reducing bycatch," she said. – Sapa-AFP

