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Namibian Study Shows Tuna Catch Plunges on Oil Exploration

By Felix Njini - Nov 25, 2013

Oil and gas exploration in [Namibia](#)'s southern waters has slashed the nation's tuna catch, according to a study commissioned by the government.

The harvest dropped to 650 metric tons so far this year from 1,800 tons in 2012 and 4,046 tons in 2011, Anna Erastus, policy planning director at the fisheries and marine resources ministry, said in the study.

"With increasing amounts of seismic exploration in Namibian waters recently, tuna catches have dropped," she said.

Namibia earned \$400 million from fish exports in 2012, according to Paarl, South Africa-based NKC Research. The industry, along with tourism and mining, is one of the biggest sources of foreign exchange for the country's economy.

A group established to investigate the ecological effects of seismic exploration is recommending that the government delays a proposed seismic survey for oil and gas in Tripp Seamount, a main tuna-fishing-ground, situated close to the South African border. Fishing should be put back until after March next year to avoid a period where 70 percent of Namibia's tuna catch is taken, Erastus said.

An oil and gas exploration company that intends to conduct seismic exploration early next year is also proposing to do a survey in South African waters in February, just across the border, Erastus said, without identifying the company.

"This is in direct path of tuna migrating from South Africa to Namibian waters," she said. Sound blasts during seismic surveys "could send the tuna into avoidance mode, so that they are not available to be caught by fishing vessels during what would normally be the height of the pole and line tuna season."

Fish Migration

Seismic exploration should be permitted between May and September when the tuna-fishing-season ends, Erastus said.

Namibia has “alerted South Africa to the seriousness of the issue,”, requesting the neighboring country consider the same approach.

“Tuna migrates up through South African waters to Namibia, and the South African tuna industry is similarly affected,” she said. A co-ordinated strategy with South Africa is needed or the “fishing and oil and gas seismic exploration sectors will not be able to co-exist.”

In Namibia tuna landings are made at the southern port of Luderitz with the pole-and-line fishing season lasting from December to May, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation.

About 90 percent of the catch is albacore tuna with the rest being bigeye, yellowfin and skipjack tuna.

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