

Invest in marine sector with care

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INVESTING in the country's oceans has the potential to grow the economy, but it needs to be done sustainably and cautiously, say researchers and environmental experts.

They were speaking before President Jacob Zuma's visit to Durban today to discuss Operation Phakisa: Oceans Economy.

The initiative, which was launched in July 2014, looks to maximise the use of South Africa's coastline – stretching 3 900km – as a means to grow the country's economy.

According to the Presidency, it has the potential to contribute up to R177 billion to the gross domestic product (GDP) and create more than 1

million jobs by 2033. Its ultimate goal is to fight against the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality, through marine transport and manufacturing; offshore oil and gas; aquaculture; marine protection services and ocean governance; small harbours development; and coastal and marine tourism.

UKZN-based integrated aquaculture specialist Dr Deborah Robertson-Anderson said that aside from economic growth and training, the move to explore environments could help with access to new resources and even assist in establishing food security through aquaculture.

But, she said, the marine environments would not be left unharmed.

“This is why the development is listed as sustainable: it has to meet the needs of the now as well as the needs of the future, as we are looking at resources, many of (which) are finite. By removing them, there will be alterations to environments and ecosystems.”

The hope, she said, was to do this in a manner where the environment could cope with the changes.

Environmental group groundWork's climate and energy justice campaign manager Samuel Chademana said there were three main areas of probable risk associated with the operation, specifically looking at oil and gas: its contribution to greenhouse gas emissions; its impact on marine life; and its fallout in

terms of human health and livelihoods. Chademana said that, as part of the prospecting phase, oil and gas companies had been using seismic surveys as the preferred method of locating oil and gas reserves under the ocean floor.

“These seismic surveys use extremely loud sound blasts able to penetrate deep into the sea floor for detecting oil deposits, every 10 seconds for 24 hours a day, for months at a time over large areas.”

These blasts, he said, could interrupt the communication, reproduction, navigation and eating habits essential to the survival of marine life.

He said the proposed benefits would be reversed if the environmental costs weren't taken into consideration. ►►P7