

CLOSING REMARKS – MICK O'TOOLE

Before I start, I would like to thank Hashali for inviting me to attend this 6th Annual Science Forum of the BCC. It's a great pleasure to return to Namibia and to see how much progress has been made in marine science in the BCLME region over the last 5 years. It has also been very good to re-establish contacts with old friends and colleagues especially at the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources at NatMIRC.

Over the last few days, we have seen a great variety of scientific presentations ranging from genetic studies of hake stocks to oceanographic surveys, the impacts of low oxygen on fish larvae, and the impacts of seabed mining on fisheries and marine biodiversity. They covered a broad range of marine science topics focusing largely on ecological sustainable fisheries practices to modelling and resource survey methodology. We also had some interesting questions from the floor and discussions on various issues and scientific challenges facing sustainable management of the Benguela Current Large Marine Ecosystem.

Of particular interest have been the scientific research work carried out under the German GENUS project, the EU Ecofish Project and the Norwegian NansClim Project. These projects are undoubtedly building significant marine research capacity throughout the region.

I have been especially impressed by the high quality of presentations which were given including the ROV video clips of marine snow at the bottom layers off the Cunene and the laboratory behavioural studies carried out on the pelagic gobies. The posters, on gelatinous mesoplankton, seabed moorings and oil spill monitoring were both interesting and informative.

It was clear from the presentations that there was significant improvement in the standard of marine scientific research presented by the younger researchers. It was encouraging to see so many joint publications involving scientists from the region and Institutions and Universities from a number of European countries. Increased capacity building in the form of post-graduate training of young scientists from the region was also demonstrated through the high number of MSc and PhD students attending overseas programmes. What was very noticeable also was the high degree of confidence and public speaking skills demonstrated by a number of young marine scientists in presenting their results.

Confidence has also been demonstrated in the BCC and its science plan through the continued support of partner countries and institutions especially by the Genus Project (Germany), the Ecofish Project (Germany) and the Norwegian NanClim project. Transboundary cruises are taking place on an on-going basis with the FAO-Nansen project with research work expanding beyond fisheries to include advanced oceanographic monitoring, bio-geochemistry and marine biodiversity mapping. Significant advances have also been made over the last 5 years in addressing scientific knowledge gaps in the Benguela Current LME and in linking marine scientific research to management.

New challenges are also facing the BCC in addressing and linking environmental monitoring and assessments, ecosystem based management and seabed mining e.g. marine phosphates. The outcomes of these interaction will impacts ocean policy in the BCLME region and impacts applied marine economic development. These issues will have to be addressed in the months and years ahead by the BCC and the countries of the region leading to a balanced and applied guidelines driven by evidenced based scientific results and the sound principles of ecosystem based management.

The BCC and it's convention have only been recently been endorsed by the three countries and continued investment and support is required to ensure its sustainability. It took ten years (1997 – 2007) to develop and implement the BCLME Programme and to establish transboundary co-operation and the Interim Benguela Current Commission and Secretariat. It has taken a further 5 years (2008-2013) to strengthen the legal instruments of the BCC and to formally prepare the Benguela Convention and have it formally endorsed by Angola, Namibia and South Africa. It will take a further 10 years for the BCC to reach maturity and for the real benefits and rewards from the GEF and parter country investments to be fully realised. In the meantime, the BCLME and the BCC are leading the way in management of large marine ecosystems and the region has become the flagship of GEF family of LME's worldwide.

I have known Dr Hashali for a long time, both as a colleague and fellow marine scientist working at NatMIRC and during the time when he was employed as Direction of the Activity Centre for Fisheries during the earlier BCLME Programme. Since taking over the job as Executive Secretary of the BCC in 2008, excellent progress has been made by the Secretariat and his team, the highlight which was the signing of the Benguela Convention by the three countries last March. It is great to also see the great work being done in outreach and public relations at the local, region and international levels as well as the attractively designed and informative website and the user friendly and well illustrated brochures and reports. Strong international links have also been built by the BCC over the last few years with the GEF, IOC-UNESCO and ICES with culminated with a presentation on the BCLME / BCC at a special AAAS -LME meeting held in the JFK Library in Boston, USA in 2012.

Finally, I would like to commend Hashali and his team for their efforts in organising this 6th Annual Science Forum of the BCC. He also deserves much credit for securing the hosting of the 3rd Global LME Conference in Swakopmund and for the hard work that this entailed both in the organisation and attracting some of the top international experts in marine science and management. The timing on this conference was also important in terms of the on-going development of several new LME projects, the valuable networking between UN agencies and regional coordinators and discussions on future funding for LME projects. By all accounts, it was a great success.