

Blue Economy Summit

Speech by Mr Jean Claude de l'Estrac,
Secretary-General of the Indian Ocean Commission

Abu Dhabi – 19-20 January, 2014

It's an honour for me to address this assembly on behalf of the Member States of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC)

The IOC is the only regional organisation comprising of Island States in Africa, namely: Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Seychelles and Réunion Island, a French department. *J'ai plaisir à saluer la participation de la delegation de La Réunion à nos travaux.*

The islands of the South West of the Indian Ocean decided 30 years ago that close co-operation between our Member States should be the privileged means of taking up the challenges of sustainable development in our "regional seas". Our organisation is therefore actively supporting the initiatives of our Member States to harness the vast opportunities provided by the ocean economy.

First, we do so by tackling a number of threats which are putting at risk our marine resources.

One of our most urgent challenges is to mitigate the devastating effects of climate change. The IOC has helped the region to improve its understanding of the evolution of climate changes. We are now developing adaptation and resilience plans and attracting resources and specialised know-how.

Our region is one of the 34 “hot spots” on the planet, meaning that it has a unique natural environment which is under threat. Our EU financed Biodiversity programme aims at preserving the natural integrity of our region.

Our overall aim is to reconcile economic principles and ecological values. This is particularly visible in our projects relating to fisheries.

The most important trans-boundary fisheries resource is tuna. More than a million tons representing a market value of about 2 billion dollars are caught in our region. But with 5.5 million square kilometres of exclusive economic zones at our disposal, none of our countries possesses, on its own, the capacity to control these vast oceanic regions.

To support this sector which generates wealth, contributes to food security and created jobs, the IOC has been implementing several projects:

1. the Tuna tagging programme has allowed us to understand the evolution of the tuna stocks and to identify measures for sustainability such as quota allocations;
2. the Regional Plan for Fisheries Surveillance demonstrates what our island states are capable of when they join forces. Since 2007, our 35 regional fisheries surveillance missions have led to a total of 400 ship inspections at sea;
3. the Smartfish programme aims at improving fisheries development and management taking into account the economic, commercial, legal, nutritional and ecological dimensions.

However, the benefits accruing to the countries in the region amount to less than 10% of the value of fisheries. The future challenge of the SIDS will be to strategize how to derive a larger benefit to our countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

These concrete initiatives of the IOC with the assistance of numerous partners are providing a strong foundation for the development of the Blue Economy in our region.

Nonetheless, because of limited resources our island States and regional organisations as well do not have today the technical and human capacity to meet the requirements to be eligible to new development tools such as the Adaptation Fund. That's why I call for a facilitated dialogue and access to this exceptional mechanism for the regions that most need it.

This is the message we will be taking to Samoa pleading for a differentiated approach for Small Island Developing States. However, vast our oceans to the seas may be, the smallness of our land mass will remain as well as our constraints to harness the potential from the seas: there are the small size of our populations, our limited productive capacities, small internal markets, isolation and lots of vulnerabilities to climate changes.

May I end by thanking the Government of Abu Dhabi and the Government of Seychelles for the initiative to showcase the prospects towards the development of vast fields of opportunities thanks to the Blue Economy.

Thank you for your attention.