



The Hon Steven Ciobo MP

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs

Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Trade and Investment

The First IORA Ministerial Blue Economy Conference

Speech

Mauritius

3 September 2015

Introduction and Acknowledgements

The Honorable Sir Anerood Jugnauth, Prime Minister of the Republic of Mauritius;
Distinguished Ministers;

IORA Secretary General Ambassador Bhagirath;

Ladies and gentlemen.

It's a privilege to be here today and I would like to thank the Government of Mauritius and the Secretariat for the organisation of this event.

If we look east over the Indian Ocean from Mauritius, where we have been warmly welcomed, the first land we'd see would be Australia.

Australia is a long way away. We are both separated – and joined – by the vastness of the Indian Ocean.

In a few days, on the Indian Ocean's eastern shore, Australian Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, will open the second Indian Ocean Dialogue.

She will undoubtedly talk, as she has done, about the need for Australia – as a continent which faces both oceans – to think of ourselves in the context of the Indo-Pacific.

This reflects our expectation that the big strategic issues in our region will be maritime.

Throughout our modern history, Australia has been known for our exports – lamb, wool, minerals, agriculture – exports from the land.

But we are a coastal state – an island state – the biggest in the world. In the words of our national anthem, we're literally girt by sea.

Most [*over 80 %*] Australians live within 50 kilometres of the coast. Worldwide, we are known for our affinity with our oceans, our love for the beach.

Australia is also the only state to occupy a whole continent. We have no land borders.

Where our interests meet those of our neighbours is along our maritime boundaries.

So the potential – and the fate – of the oceans that surround us in the Indo-Pacific region we call home, is incredibly important to us.

Our ocean territory contributes over \$47 billion to the Australian economy each year through tourism, offshore oil and gas, aquaculture, fishing, and shipping.

We want to see marine economic activity as a similar driver for Indian Ocean rim economies. That is why we introduced the blue economy as the topic of the Ministerial retreat at the 2014 Council of Ministers' Meeting in Perth.

And we welcomed its inclusion in the IORA Economic Declaration, enshrining the blue economy in our shared vision for growth in our region.

We know that IORA embraces different political and economic systems, as well as values. But where we find agreement and common ground, it is precisely this diversity that becomes our greatest strength.

The blue economy really is an opportunity to work together toward a common purpose.

To harness the opportunity of the oceans as a key source of economic growth and job creation, acknowledging the particular importance for small island developing states.

But while we see great growth potential in our shared resource, we must recognize our ocean is increasingly under stress. Exploiting the ocean's resources needs to be done sustainably.

It requires scientific research and innovation – one of Australia's strengths.

Last month we launched the National Marine Science Plan, which was developed in consultation with marine research organizations, universities, government, scientists and stakeholders.

This plan will be at the heart of how we deal with future challenges as a marine nation. And how we grow our ocean's economic potential while safeguarding its longer term health.

We want to see the benefits of Australian scientific research extend to all shores of the Indian Ocean.

This is why we have invested \$34 million in the Indian Ocean Marine Research Centre at the University of Western Australia.

We are proud of our contribution to IORA and the blue economy during our time as Chair.

We look to Indonesia as incoming Chair to take forward our mutual maritime interests. You can be assured of Australia's support in this endeavour in the years ahead.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is still much to be done in our region to promote prosperity and stability.

In our view, the best way to achieve this is through maritime security and safety, sustainable economic growth and strengthening regional architecture.

Today we will focus on the immediate issues in front of us – the blue economy – but we see our deliberations as part of a larger trajectory of stronger regional cooperation.

I look forward to our discussion and welcome the contributions of each and every IORA member state.