

**IORA Outgoing Chair's statement by Australia's Foreign Minister
The Hon Julie Bishop MP
23 October 2015**

I am delighted to be here in Padang for the 15th IORA Council of Ministers Meeting. I acknowledge Minister Marsudi as the incoming Chair for Indonesia and I thank Indonesia for hosting us with such warmth.

I also acknowledge Deputy Minister Mfeketo as the incoming vice chair for South Africa.

During our time as Chair, Australia sought to make IORA a stronger and more practically-oriented regional institution, building on the strong foundations laid by India as the Chair before us. I believe we succeeded. IORA is indeed the premier organisation of the Indian Ocean region.

We should all be proud of IORA's achievements over the last few years.

IORA's international profile is at an all-time high. There is renewed interest in IORA from countries across the region and further afield, in joining as Member States and Dialogue Partners. We will soon welcome Somalia as IORA's twenty-first member and later today we look forward to welcoming Germany as IORA's seventh dialogue partner.

This is a sign of IORA's growing influence and stature as a regional organisation.

Earlier this year I wrote to the Secretary General of the United Nations, seeking acceptance of IORA as an observer of the United Nations General Assembly. I also wrote to the African Union Commission Chair, seeking accreditation of IORA as an observer to the African Union. I am pleased to report that both applications are well on track.

Australia has been determined to sharpen IORA's strategic focus.

When Australia introduced the blue economy – the sustainable use of our marine resources – as a policy priority at the 2014 IORA Ministerial Retreat in Perth, we hoped that it would capture the interest of the IORA membership. It has since gained traction with overwhelming endorsement by IORA members as a centrally important element of our ongoing work.

As part of our focus on the blue economy, Australia announced at the 2014 Council of Ministers Meeting a significant investment to support economic diplomacy initiatives in the region and promote prosperity in the Indian Ocean: the IORA Economic Diplomacy Fund.

I am pleased to announce that activities totalling AUD1 million have now commenced under this Fund. These activities contribute directly to blue economic growth, trade and investment in the Indian Ocean region. They focus on sustainable aquaculture technologies, regional fisheries management, port operations standards, and marine science and technological exchange.

The activities will involve 18 of the current 20 IORA member countries. We will provide further updates as the activities progress.

Australia is committed to finding innovative ways to support sustainable economic growth from the ocean resources of our Indian Ocean neighbours.

Harnessing the power of innovation will be essential in sourcing new solutions to difficult development challenges, and to finding new ways of encouraging sustainable economic growth.

I am pleased to announce that Australia will run a Grand Challenge, *Reengineering Aquaculture for Sustainability*, to source scientific and technological innovations from a global audience of problem solvers.

I have allocated AUD3 million to support the best ideas resulting from this Challenge and support the trial and testing of these ideas in the Indian Ocean.

Now is the time to tackle this critical challenge and harness the power of our collective minds to find sustainable solutions.

Australia will lead the search for new and innovative scientific and technological breakthroughs with this Aquaculture Grand Challenge.

Let's reengineer aquaculture for the benefit of all countries that have ocean and in-land water resources; and let's start with the Indian Ocean.

I look forward to providing more details on this announcement later today.

As IORA Chair, Australia has championed the issue of women's empowerment. We know that women's empowerment is one of the most effective drivers of economic growth. No country or community, regardless of its circumstances, can reach its full potential while drawing on the ideas and talent of only half its population.

At the 2013 COMM, I introduced the topic of women's empowerment as a cross-cutting issue to be mainstreamed across all of IORA's work. This initiative was met with immediate enthusiasm. It is a fact that the Indian Ocean Rim has some of the lowest labour force participation rates of women anywhere in the world. Increasing labour force participation of women results in major increases in GDP – it can be worth billions to a region.

Empowering women economically is not only the right thing to do. It is the smart thing to do.

We have made good progress in addressing gender equality over these last two years. Australia hosted an IORA women's economic empowerment event with UN Development Program in Kuala Lumpur in August 2014 and a women's economic empowerment event in partnership with business at the 2014 Ministerial meeting.

More recently, we hosted a second IORA women's economic empowerment event with UN Women and the Government of the Republic of Seychelles, on Mahé Island, Seychelles, in August 2015. Australia's Ambassador for Women and Girls, Natasha Stott Despoja, represented Australia for this important event, which brought together representatives of business, chambers of commerce, government and civil society to consider ways to address the limits to women's participation in the workforce.

Australia was pleased to launch at the event a landmark report outlining the status of women in the region, called *Enabling Women's Contributions to the Indian Ocean Rim Economies*. It provides baseline data on gender equality and explores enabling factors for women's economic empowerment in Indian Ocean Rim countries. Copies of the report will be distributed to you during the course of the day.

Participants at the Seychelles event adopted the *Mahé Consensus on Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment*, which outlined a range of action to further strengthen

IORA member states' commitment to progressing women's empowerment in the Indian Ocean region.

To further underpin our commitment to this issue, and to consolidate IORA's focus on women's economic empowerment, I am pleased to announce that Australia will hold a high level women's economic empowerment event in 2016. This event will seek to bring together senior women business leaders from across IORA member states so that others can learn from their successes.

Our work over these past two years has been broader than the blue economy and women's empowerment. We have also maintained a strong focus on maritime security and safety.

Australia is committed to working collaboratively to address shared maritime safety and security challenges through building robust, inclusive and effective regional cooperation.

Indeed this was a strong theme of the second Indian Ocean Dialogue which I was pleased to open in Perth last month – my home city, and Australia's Indian Ocean capital. The Indian Ocean Dialogue discussed issues around maritime transnational crime, maritime security and regional defence cooperation, regional search and rescue cooperation, the blue economy, illegal fishing, and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

The Dialogue culminated in the *Perth Consensus*, which noted as a key theme of discussions the need for greater cooperation and information sharing in addressing challenges in the maritime space, particularly transnational crime.

While there has been a welcome decrease in the threat of piracy off the coast of Somalia in recent years, there has been an increase in other forms of transnational maritime crime across the Indian Ocean - particularly drug trafficking, but also migrant smuggling, human trafficking, illegal fishing and illicit wildlife trafficking.

Our ability to successfully combat these threats to our safety, security and development will depend on the strength of our cooperation.

UN Office of Drugs and Crime's successful establishment of the Indian Ocean Forum on Maritime Crime (IOFMC) provides a significant opportunity to strengthen this cooperation, particularly among our law enforcement and customs agencies.

Australia believes an association between IORA and IOFMC would drive closer collaboration among IORA members to detect, investigate and disrupt maritime crime. It would allow members to tap into UN Office of Drugs and Crime's resources and expertise, with minimal resourcing impact on IORA.

While the proposal is not formally on our agenda today, Australia will continue to support the proposed association between IORA and IOFMC.

Australia was pleased to have assumed the chair of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) – in addition to our role as IORA Chair – in March 2014. We see considerable scope for the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium to lead in coordinating certain operational approaches that would complement IORA's broader mandate.

Looking ahead, and noting the clear complementarities between the work of IONS and IORA, we hope to see further discussion of how we might explore greater synergies between these two Indian Ocean organisations.

At the 2014 Ministerial meeting five of our members signed on to the IORA MOU on Search and Rescue across the Indian Ocean region, which promotes regional coordination of search and rescue efforts. A further two states signed earlier this year, and we look forward to another two signing on to the MOU today.

We encourage all IORA members to become signatories to the MOU, which complements existing and established bilateral arrangements and supports existing global architecture. Support for the MOU highlights the collective desire to protect the safety and security of those who traverse the Indian Ocean.

A final thought about outreach: Australia started a process of greater engagement by the business community in IORA with a business-to-government session at the 2014 Council of Ministers meeting in Perth. This enabled a constructive dialogue between senior business figures from the Indian Ocean region and IORA ministers.

I am pleased to see that this morning, for the first time, we will have presentations to the IORA membership by senior representatives of Chambers of Commerce from the IORA Troika. This is a positive step indeed.

Similarly, Australia has sought to secure a greater role for IORA's Dialogue Partners, including by inviting them for the first time to the IORA Ministerial Retreat at the 2014 meeting. I am pleased to see this practice being continued today.

If we are to increase IORA's influence and usefully expand our agenda, then we must continue to engage the business community, and we must find new ways to engage our very valuable Dialogue Partners. I look forward to our Ministerial Retreat discussions on these matters later today.

I have appreciated the opportunity to Chair IORA. Australia's two year term as Chair has provided us the opportunity to broaden our horizons, by strengthening the Indian Ocean region as a common economic and strategic resource. I am confident this will contribute to all of our shared prosperity — and through greater prosperity, greater regional stability.

I am particularly pleased to be relinquishing the Chair at a time when IORA is in good shape, and valued by its members.

Indonesia's proposal to commemorate IORA's 20th anniversary with a leaders' summit and an IORA concord is certainly aspirational and is to be commended. Australia will work closely and constructively with Indonesia in progressing this initiative.

I am confident that Indonesia will lift IORA to new heights. I look forward to supporting you, Minister Marsudi, with your ambitious agenda for IORA over the coming two years.