

Minister of Sustainable Development and Wildlife, The Honorable Mr Jayawickrama Perera,
Australian High Commissioner Designate to Sri Lanka, His Excellency Mr Bryce Hutchesson,
Members of the diplomatic corps,
Distinguished Guests,
Delegates and Experts.

The IORA Secretary General, Ambassador Bhagirath, expresses his sincere regrets that he cannot join you today, and asks that I convey the following message:

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I wish to take this opportunity to express my deep thanks to the Government of Sri Lanka for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements for this workshop.

My appreciation goes also to the Australian Government for co-hosting the event as well as to the Sri Lankan Institute of Policy Studies, the International Whaling Commission and Murdoch University's Cetacean Research Unit.

[I would also like to warmly acknowledge the representatives from the Government of Somalia who are participating in the first IORA activity as our 21st Member State. You are most welcome and we look forward to seeing you at future IORA events.]

As you are well aware, IORA is the apex inter-governmental organisation in the Indian Ocean with 21 member states and 7 Dialogue Partners. Our primary objective is to facilitate regional cooperation especially in trade and investment and through capacity building projects.

Our activities are carried out in six priority sectors:

- maritime safety and security,
- trade and investment facilitation,
- fisheries management,
- disaster risk management,
- academic, science and technology cooperation,
- and tourism and cultural exchange.

Women's economic empowerment as well as the Blue Economy are key areas of focus. It is clear that this workshop has relevance to all of these areas.

At the First IORA Blue Economy Conference, held in Mauritius in last September, Ministers highlighted the need for IORA countries to harness the potential of the Indian Ocean.

Blue economy industries can ensure coastal communities, countries and regions value, manage and use the ocean while safe guarding the habitats and ecosystems that provide food and livelihoods.

Previous IORA tourism meetings such as the First Ministerial Meeting, in Seychelles in November 2014, have also highlighted the need for Member States to better optimize the benefits from ocean resources.

Tourism is a main source of foreign exchange earnings for most IORA Member States. In fact, marine tourism generates more global revenue than aquaculture and fisheries combined. An often cited statistic from 2010 states 13 million people went whale watching each year in 119 countries, generating \$2.1 billion US dollars. I'm the sure the experts will share other statistics in the coming days.

Besides being a global phenomenon, whale and dolphin watching tourism is increasing rapidly in the Indian Ocean. A region is rich marine resources that covers 30% of the world's ocean area.

There is considerable scope to deepen our regional collaboration on whale and dolphin watching tourism. It is important for our Member States to possess the necessary knowledge and tools. As the concept paper notes, there are currently no region-wide mechanisms for IORA Member States to share experiences and expertise.

I am pleased to note that today 16 IORA member states are represented. You come from Ministries of Tourism, Fisheries, Aquaculture, academia and beyond, and are uniquely positioned to share your national perspectives with your Indian Ocean neighbours.

I am also pleased to note this is a sector that provides opportunities for women's economic empowerment and we will also shortly hear from female researchers who are excelling in their field.

For the next three days, we have a platform to deepen our understanding of the Indian Ocean, and to showcase local solutions to the challenges we face. Challenges such as vessel strikes, managing stresses on animal populations, and loss of habitat. We have an opportunity to develop multidisciplinary and regional approaches. Indeed, one aim of the workshop is to evaluate the need for an IORA Whale and Dolphin Watching Tourism Network to improve collective action.

We look forward to seeing your recommendations!

Let me briefly describe the next steps...

The outcomes from this workshop will be presented to the next IORA Committee of Senior Officials. This meeting occurs twice a year and will be next hosted by IORA's current Chair, Indonesia, in Surabaya in May. If endorsed by the National Focal Points, these recommendations will be in turn provided to the IORA Council of Ministers meeting. This is our peak decision making body who will meet in October 2016 in Jakarta for final endorsement and implementation.

The proposed establishment of a Network is consistent with IORA objectives, as it would build capacity, knowledge, skills and networking of IORA Member States through regional cooperation. I confirm that the Secretariat, under the guidance of the Member States, is ready to play its part in taking forward your recommendations. And we will do so with commitment and enthusiasm.

Excellencies, let me conclude by once again thanking the Governments of Sri Lanka and Australia for convening this workshop. Both countries have served as IORA Chair and continue to play strong leadership roles. I also thank the participants and presenters for their willingness to share their expertise, and acknowledge the many people who have been working behind the scenes to make this event possible.

We look forward to tangible outcomes that can be implemented for the strengthening of whale and dolphin watching tourism in the Indian Ocean.

In the IORA Secretariat, we like to quote an African saying. You may have heard it before...

If You Want To Go Fast, Go Alone. If You Want To Go Far, Go Together.

We look forward to going far and together with you and wish you every success during the workshop.