



forestry, fisheries & the environment

Department:
Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

THEME: The regional collaboration for a sustainable blue economy: enhancing ocean governance in the Western Indian Ocean Region.

OPENING REMARKS OF THE HONOURABLE DR. GEORGE, MINISTER OF FORESTRY, FISHERIES, AND THE ENVIRONMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, DELIVERED BY THE DEPUTY DIRECTOR-GENERAL, ADV. RADIA RAZACK AT THE 11TH CONFERENCE OF PARTIES OF THE NAIROBI CONVENTION 11TH CONFERENCE OF PARTIES (COP 11) MADAGASCAR ON THE 20,21 AND 22 AUGUST 2024.

Your Excellencies, the Ministers of Environment from all member states or their Delegated Representatives

Executive Director of the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP).

Chair of the Nairobi Convention Bureau from the Republic of Madagascar.

Distinguished Members of the Nairobi Convention.

Partners

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

All protocol observed

On behalf of the Honourable Dr. Dion George, the recently appointed Minister of Forestry, Fisheries, and the Environment of the Republic of South Africa, I extend warm greetings to all present. Regrettably, due to pressing domestic obligations, Dr. George is unable to attend in person. It is my privilege to represent him at this High-Level Segment of the 11th Conference of Parties of the Nairobi Convention.

At the outset, allow me to convey South Africa's deepest gratitude to the government and people of the Republic of Madagascar for graciously hosting this significant meeting. We also commend the remarkable progress made in implementing the commitments agreed upon during the 10th COP.

We extend our heartfelt congratulations and gratitude for the unwavering support that has contributed to the successful implementation of the 2022-2024 Work Programme and the decisions of COP10.

The Republic of South Africa warmly welcomes the proposed Work Programme for 2025-2028 and commends the collaborative spirit that has characterized the Convention's approach to its implementation. We urge all partners of the Nairobi Convention to renew their steadfast commitment and redouble their efforts in supporting the successful execution of this Work Programme and the decisions we are poised to adopt today. Let us continue to work together in the spirit of cooperation and shared responsibility.

South Africa reaffirms its steadfast commitment to the Nairobi Convention and remains dedicated to fostering regional collaboration and cooperation. Like many coastal nations, South Africa's marine and coastal environments face significant threats of degradation due to a myriad of activities carried out on land and at sea, many of which are contributing to our Tripple Planetary Crisis. The degradation resulting from these activities poses serious risks to marine life, coastal communities, and human health. Some of the impacts are transboundary in nature, underscoring the necessity for regional cooperation in developing effective control measures.

We applaud the Nairobi Convention Secretariat for their pivotal role in coordinating efforts across the Western Indian Ocean Region, which strengthens our collective initiatives to conserve and protect our coastal and marine environments.

South Africa is in the final stages of ratifying the Protocol for the Protection of the Marine and Coastal Environment of the Western Indian Ocean from Land-based Sources and Activities. Additionally, we have initiated the process of ratifying the

Protocol on Integrated Coastal Zone Management, following its adoption at the Conference of Plenipotentiaries held here in Madagascar in September 2023. Our national policy, legislation and institutional frameworks are aligned with these instruments. We strongly encourage our fellow Parties to undertake similar efforts, ensuring that these instruments come into force at the earliest opportunity.

South Africa has also initiated the process to sign the Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, concerning the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ Agreement). We commend Seychelles and Mauritius for their leadership in ratifying the Agreement, joining a select few nations who have taken this important step.

Over the years, traditional maritime activities, such as shipping and commercial fishing, have intensified, while new sectors, including aquaculture and offshore mining and renewable energy, have emerged. However, this increased activity at sea is occurring against a backdrop of growing insecurity, degradation of the marine environment, declining biodiversity, and the exacerbating impacts of climate change. The relevance of the Western Indian Ocean Regional Ocean Governance Strategy that will be adopted in this COP, cannot be more important, to realize its vision of a *“peaceful stable Western Indian Ocean region with an environmentally healthy ocean and a blue economy based on the protection and conservation of natural resources that delivers sustainable benefits with due regard to equity and wellbeing.”*

The world's enduring socio-economic relationship with the ocean is undergoing significant evolution. As a vital arena for global trade and commerce, and as a critical source of food and energy, the ocean's contribution to the global economy is already substantial and poised to become an even more powerful economic force.

South Africa is finalising its Ocean Economy Master Plan and consolidating implementation plans, to further unlock the development of the sector and its ocean-based industries. The Plan builds upon the work of Operation Phakisa, initiated in 2014 to fast track the growth of our oceans economy. Oceans Economy plans as a baseline, unpacks subsector value chains, to advance stabilization, revival and

growth of the sub-sectors within the Oceans Economy to ensure increased contribution to job creation, GDP, economic recovery and potential growth. The targeted sub-sectors are Marine Manufacturing and Repairs; • Maritime Transport (including Freight, Logistics and Cargo); • Aquaculture (Freshwater and Marine); • Fisheries (Small-scale and Commercial); and • Offshore Oil and Gas (Exploration).

Given that a sustainable blue ocean economy is a key contributor to the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the realization of Africa's Agenda 2063 aspirations, the role of regional bodies such as the Nairobi Convention is of critical importance.

Honourable Chair, The new directions being proposed in the new 2025-2028 Work Programme align with our national objectives, particularly as we strive to address critical issues such as biodiversity loss, climate change, and pollution. These urgent concerns must be addressed to make meaningful progress toward the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2025, particularly the goal of significantly reducing pollution from all sources. The Work Programme's emphasis on managing water and sediment quality in hotspot areas, alongside the continued development of the regional contingency plan, is especially encouraging.

The challenges posed by transboundary oil spills underscore the critical need for regional cooperation. While the Republic of Mauritius has made commendable progress in addressing the aftermath of the MV WAKASHIO incident over the past three years, the region continues to face significant challenges, including the necessity for formalized procedures to request assistance and the effective coordination of external and regional efforts to combat oil spills. South Africa firmly believes that establishing a Regional Coordination Mechanism is essential for standardizing cross-country response systems and procedures, ensuring a unified approach to such incidents. Additionally, it is imperative that we develop a sustainable financial model to support this Mechanism.

The implementation of the Incident Management System (IMS), introduced under the Oil & Gas and Maritime Transport sectors of Operation Phakisa, represents a significant achievement. South Africa currently stands as the only country in the

region deploying IMS to manage marine oil spills in a systematic and coordinated manner, reflecting our commitment to enhancing regional preparedness.

Furthermore, South Africa welcomes the partnership between the Nairobi Convention and the Ports Management Association of Eastern and Southern Africa (PMEASA), supported by the CSIR, which has enabled the pilot rollout of the Toolkit for Green Port Development. Transnet National Ports Authority is actively integrating this toolkit into its port systems, with plans to expand its implementation across all national ports.

We believe that initiatives such as these, along with the targets outlined in the new Work Programme, will significantly bolster our collective capacity to protect and sustain the marine and coastal environment across the region.

In conclusion, while Africa's oceans are among the world's richest environmental resources, their significance as a source of income for driving the growth of African economies, beyond traditional activities such as fishing, remains underappreciated. A sustainable blue or ocean economy holds immense promise for contributing to the success of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly SDG 14, as well as the realization of the Continent's Agenda 2063 aspirations.

It is with optimism that we anticipate that the decisions made at this 11th Conference of Parties will significantly contribute to unlocking Africa's Blue Economy potential by establishing a comprehensive governance framework for the sustainable management of the Western Indian Ocean region. This will benefit all Member States of the Convention and ensure the effective implementation of the 2025-2028 Work Programme.

We extend our thanks to all for a fruitful and productive session, which will no doubt yield successful outcomes for WIO region

Thank you