

Closing Address

J. STARK

First, let me say that, having only recently become acquainted with the Okavango Delta, I am the logical choice to be selected to make the closing speech for this Conference. I am sure that in choosing me, my selectees had in mind the obvious fact that I would have no choice but to be brief. This I intend to do and my remarks will be general rather than specific, particularly since the complete proceedings are to be printed.

I believe that we have accomplished our objective of gathering together as much scientific knowledge as possible on the Okavango and holding public discussions on it. It may be considered as a prelude to further public involvement in the decision-making process.

One thing, or rather one theme, that I have heard expressed most often, and we heard it expressed again by Dr Thompson this morning, is the idea of a "go slow" approach. It has been stated in various ways: "You may be better off to leave the Swamp alone until all the necessary research has been completed," and "Don't push the System to produce beyond its normal capabilities; to do so you must add energy, and this tends to degrade the System." The Economist expressed it, I thought, in another way when he said: "The risks of Development are great for Loss of Capital." I heard this same view expressed in other ways, and certainly our own trial-and-error experiences of development in the Everglades should serve as a note of caution.

It would seem wise, at this point, to accentuate what I understand is working for you today, even in limited quantities: crafts, tourism, wildlife, cattle, fishing and subsistence agriculture, while at the same time conducting additional research and planning that would support future land-use decisions regarding the Okavango. This research should be goal-orientated research, arrived at after extensive dialogue between the decision-makers and the researchers. It could, in fact, be aimed at examining what future research should be done to ensure final objective and sustained utilisation in the Delta.

Actually, I thought the Vice-President, Dr Masire, expressed an extremely perceptive attitude towards the Okavango when he said that "handling the Okavango makes us nervous; it is like a doctor treating his own child." I cannot help but observe that with leadership like this, the Okavango is certainly in good hands.

We have had several days of divergent views and stimulating discussion here, and if each of us reflects back on the moments we found to be most stimulating, I believe that these would be when divergent viewpoints were being argued. I would like to congratulate each of you for expressing your convictions, for it is by doing this that you have added to this Conference.

I know that I can speak for all the visitor-participants when I express my gratitude for all the many courtesies that have been extended to us by so many people during this last week. Unfortunately, I am not fully acquainted with all the individuals and organisations to whom we owe our thanks; however, I would particularly like to thank the Republic of Botswana and the Botswana Society for making this Conference possible, and to conclude by expressing the appreciation of all of us to those individuals who, I know, have worked hard to make it a success.

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