



Dr Abraham Iyambo, Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources:  
"Namibia shares the global view that conservation and sustainability are keys to  
maintaining the oceans as a heritage for the future".

## Expo 98 – The Oceans: A Heritage for the Future

# SEA Namibia: Ocean Riches and Natural Resources for a New Nation

By Dr Abraham Iyambo

In 1998 the world will celebrate *The Oceans: A heritage for the future* in Lisbon, Portugal. This is the theme of the last great exposition of the twentieth century and an appropriate theme for the closing of the second millennium. During the last fifty years, significant changes have taken place in the way the world views the great oceans, that enormous two thirds of the surface of planet earth. Expo '98 will look not only at the past and present, but towards the future: what will the oceans be like and what will they sustain if our current understanding is turned into action to ensure *a heritage for the future*.

From the 1950s member states of the United Nations have come to realise that formal governance of the oceans can no longer be a matter of *laissez-faire*. Technical advances that have enabled the farthest distances and deepest ocean floors to be reached for knowledge and exploitation eroded true freedom of the sea. This necessitated a new sense of responsibility and new conservation measures. Unlike the landmasses where nations and communities can choose to take responsibility (or not) for sustaining their environmental resources within their sovereign boundaries, the oceans need collective global action that transcends

nationalism. Global action was agreed upon and formalised under what is probably one of the most significant legal innovations made by the United Nations when the world community agreed to the Law of the Sea in 1982.

The common ownership of resources beyond national territorial seas was changed forever by the introduction of the 200 nautical mile exclusive economic zone. This immeasurably changed the collective irresponsibility that previously characterised "freedom of the seas". Now it is the responsibility of nations to conserve and wisely use the resources adjacent to their coasts and, where appropriate, to allow sustainable access to these resources. Additionally, the Law of the Sea and its recent extensions, which focus on shared living marine resources require nations to cooperate responsibly. With the advent of increasingly responsible fisheries management in exclusive economic zones and beyond on the high seas nations largely follow this stricture.

Namibia shares the global view that conservation and sustainability are keys to maintaining the oceans as a heritage for the future. The Namibian people have enshrined conservation and environmental protection in their Constitution, adopted unanimously on February 9, 1990. Immediately



after independence, the first Parliament of Namibia declared an exclusive economic zone by passing the Territorial Sea and Exclusive Economic Zone of Namibia Act, Act 3 of 1990. It called on all nations hitherto exploiting fish in those waters to refrain from fishing while stocks were allowed to recover. The Namibian government instituted measures to allow the depleted fish stocks to recover to levels where they could provide sustainable yields to feed the people, energise the economy and develop the country around renewable resources.

Nature is known to be unpredictable and changeable. In 1994 and 1995, the Benguela Current, the great ocean upwelling process that drives the ecosystem of the Southeast Atlantic, altered. The normal balance of the Benguela's physical contributions to the ecosystem, temperature, oxygen, nutrients, even the speed and extent of its flow, no longer provided the basis for reproduction and growth. The hard won replenished stocks of the earlier years were again diminished, this time by nature rather than man. Fish stocks once again declined – the process of recovery had to begin again.

The Namibian experience resulted in a series of important lessons.

- During the period before independence and the declaration of the EEZ, uncontrolled fishing led to over-exploitation and near collapse of the fishing industry, stressing the need for active management.
- Fish stocks increased after the introduction of active management in 1990 and immediately thereafter up to 1993, proving that manipulated exploitation could return stocks to sustainable yields.
- During 1994 and 1995 changed climatic conditions resulted in natural declines, stressing the need to consider such a recurrence in future planning.
- Since 1996 when the Benguela seemed to have returned to normal under a determinedly conservative regime, fish stocks again began to increase, showing that with knowledge, hindsight, analysis and prediction, marine ecosystems can yield their former reaches.

Active and proper management can work and is necessary in an uncertain natural environment.

The Law of the Sea provided the new nation with the framework within which to manage its ocean resource without great challenges from previous exploiters. By being party to this convention, Namibia undertook to manage a highly productive resource on a sustainable basis. By responsible fishing wherever, in its EEZ or beyond, Namibia will seek to promote the rational use of the oceans for the benefit of all. By signing the Straddling Stocks Agreement of 1995, Namibia is taking responsibility for vessels flying its flag anywhere in the world.

At Expo '98, Namibia will demonstrate its claims to responsible attitudes towards the environment and its resources. These resources do not consist only of fish and the living marine creatures. Namibia also has rich deposits of diamonds on the seabed and energy resources under the seabed. Ocean mining for alluvial gem diamonds and exploration for gas and oil below the seabed are other economic activities dependent on the ocean. The ports of Walvis Bay and Lüderitz are resources in themselves: ports for trade

routes into and out of southern and central Africa. These issues, although they will feature in Namibia's celebration of the oceans at Lisbon, are not addressed in this special issue of *Namibia Brief* on Fishing.

The Namibian pavilion at Expo '98 will offer glimpses of the nation's interactions with the ocean; scientific aspects and the economics of the sea, cultural, historical influences and links. Some of the aspects to be captured through its theme *SEA Namibia* will include:

- the history of a new nation: Namibia as child of the United Nations;
- the origin and links with the sea and seafaring people: connection between distant peoples, early links with Portugal;
- the Benguela Current, teeming with sea life contrasted by a desert land;
- the ocean: huge, changeable sea; few safe havens, the Skeleton Coast;
- the continental shelves, valleys, escarpments, the deep sea, the mountain ranges of the Walvis Ridge, an undersea link from Cape Fria to the volcano of Tristan da Cunha;
- The seabed's mineral riches – gas and oil from ancient deposits under the seabed, alluvial diamonds; science, technology, engineering, investment;
- The ocean as a trade route, the infrastructure and mechanisms;
- The shore and nearshore life: the biodiversity of molluscs, seaweed, seals, dolphins, whales, fish stocks, seabirds and their interaction within the ecosystem;
- Cultural and religious connections: the arrival of the first Christian peoples, the crosses of Cao at Cape Cross and of Diaz at Angra Pequena (Lüderitz);
- History and culture inspired by the ocean: myths, legends, symbols and rituals;
- The shore and ocean as source of imagery: art, writing, painting, photography, performance;
- The living shores: lion and jackal on shore; unique free roaming elephant; a living desert fed by fog from the cold Benguela current.

After showing these riches at Expo '98 in Lisbon, the Namibian celebration of the oceans will travel to the major centres in Namibia.

**The author:** Dr Abraham Iyambo is Deputy Minister of Fisheries and Marine Resources and Namibian Section Commissioner General for Expo '98. He was appointed as deputy minister and a non-voting member to the National Assembly for Namibia's ruling party SWAPO in 1995. Born in Okatana in the Oshana Region in 1961, Dr Iyambo completed the BSc and PhD degrees at the University of Surrey, UK in 1990 and 1994 respectively. His career started as teacher, youth leader and instructor at Kwanza Sul, Angola from 1982 to 1984. From 1986 to 1989 he was treasurer of the Namibia Students Body in the UK and from 1988 to 1989 deputy coordinator of the Drought Relief Programme. In 1990 he became a consultant to the Ministry of Education and Culture and in 1994 to the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation and the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine resources.