



environmental affairs

Department:
Environmental Affairs
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE HONOURABLE DEPUTY MINISTER OF WATER AND ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS, MS REJOICE MABUDAFHASI, DURING THE CELEBRATION OF WORLD OCEANS DAY AT ORIENT BEACH, EAST LONDON

08 JUNE 2012

Programme Director

Executive Mayor of the Buffalo City Municipality, Councillor Zukiswa Ncitha

Executive Mayor of the Amathole District Municipality, Councillor Nomasikize Konza

Councillors

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Molweni.

It is once again a great honour for me to be able to speak at this auspicious occasion of World Oceans Day -- a day that we have come to celebrate each year on 8 June in order to reflect on the importance of oceans in our lives. It is a day which I have come to hold very dear to my heart.

Honourable guests, since the dawn of time our oceans have played a major role in shaping our societies by providing us with sustenance, clean air to breathe, everyday goods that are traded by sea, energy for our economies, recreation and a sense of spirituality. Indeed, many of us tend to turn to the sea for inspiration in life.

As a maritime nation, South Africa is surrounded by three of the world's great oceans -- the Atlantic, Southern and Indian Oceans. Together, these oceans have created enormous direct benefits for us that we must not overlook. Our oceans have led to the establishment of thriving industries in shipping, port infrastructure, mining and tourism, which in turn provides us with employment and wealth. It is said that the combined annual turnover of fishing, harbour activities and coastal tourism alone is estimated to be over 106 Billion Rand. This figure excludes the less obvious but very important life-supporting services that our oceans provide, such as climate change mitigation and water treatment.

Despite the important role that they occupy in our lives and our economy, our oceans are under significant stress from pollution, overfishing, climate change and habitat alteration. In terms of pollution alone, I am concerned by what the figures suggest. South Africans are known to discharge over 300 000 million litres of sewage every day into the marine environment, much of which is untreated or partially treated, and thus posing a serious threat to marine habitats, species and the public. The volume of sewage dumped into our ocean is increasing significantly with population growth in our coastal areas.

Over the past few decades scientists around the world have observed the appearance of so-called 'dead zones' in the ocean where the levels of oxygen are so low that marine life cannot be supported. These dead zones are often caused by excessive nutrients in sewage and agricultural run-off and results in a loss of productivity because it then means that those areas can no longer be used. We do not want these areas to appear in South Africa and therefore we must find better ways of managing our waste.

Ladies and gentlemen, as you know for this year's celebration of Ocean's Day we have decided to adopt the theme, "**Knowing our Oceans, Safeguarding its Benefits**". At the same time, we are also celebrating Environment Month with a focus on the "Green Economy". In 2010, Government launched the New Growth Path as a strategy for enhancing growth, employment creation and social equity. Under the New Growth Path, the green economy is identified as one of 6 critical sectors where decent jobs must be created.

The Green Economy is one where natural resources are treated as critical economic assets and used in a more efficient manner to achieve social equity. I believe that our oceans and the industries that it supports can make a tangible contribution to the Green Economy. Over the past decade, technological advances have unlocked several new opportunities from our oceans including pharmaceutical applications, energy generation, and new mining resources and applications. At the same time, there are also technological advances that allow for more profitable industrial output from ocean-based activities, with fewer environmental impacts. Our oceans will not survive a business-as-usual approach to development. We need a mind shift that enables us to mobilise or create new technological innovations that will allow us to interact in a more responsible manner with our oceans, whilst at the same time creating job opportunities. In a green economy we are encouraged to do things differently and to develop products that benefit the environment.

One area where I believe there is much potential for such a shift toward the green economy, is the area of waste disposal. Programme Director, I was extremely delighted to learn that right here in East London, the

Buffalo City Municipality carried out a study to consider the viability of establishing the “Emonti Green Hub”. This hub is expected to be a one stop shop where valuable energy, nutrients and water resources can be recovered from solid waste and untreated wastewater currently being discharged into the ocean at the Hood Point sewage outfall. The current situation at the Hood Point outfall continues to be unsustainable for both the city and the marine environment. The Emonti Green Hub concept, which is expected to create over 470 decent jobs, has won the best concept award at the United Nations World Water Day celebrations last year. Executive Mayor, I believe the Hub has the potential to position East London as a leader in the Green Economy. I certainly hope that the initiative will go ahead so that our ocean can receive less waste and in turn stand a greater chance of benefiting our future generations.

As a country with such large ocean spaces next to us we are beginning appreciate the real value of this national asset and how it can contribute to our livelihoods and economy. The Department has just completed drafting a “National Policy on the Environmental Management of the Oceans” and it is our intention to publish this for the people of South Africa to comment on within this financial year. Technology is really unlocking the resources that lie within our ocean. The sustainable use of these resources will have a meaningful contribution to our ability to create jobs in years to come. Much of our ocean remains unexplored and therefore we need to urgently gather information and describe what resources we have and how they can be used sustainably. The Department looks forward to working with other Departments and government agencies to effectively explore, use and manage our oceans.

Ladies and gentlemen in order for us to position our oceans in the green economy we must understand how they function, their health status and condition, and the constraints which they place upon us. What we do tend to know now is that our oceans provide us with oxygen to breathe and food, it absorbs our waste, it erodes our beaches and other man-made structures along our coast, and it influences our climate on land. Even as I speak here today our oceans are very busy absorbing carbon from the atmosphere to soften the effects of global warming. But precisely how the oceans will affect us in the long term, and what opportunities and risks they present to us, are questions that need ongoing study.

In 2011, the Department launched an ocean observation system to assist us in finding answers to these pertinent questions. The “National Ocean and Coastal Monitoring and Research System”, as it is called, has been designed to enhance our understanding of climate change and its impacts, and to contribute toward coastal spatial planning and pollution monitoring. The system will consist of a complex set of technologies to monitor ocean conditions and coastal water quality in near-real time, thereby providing our coastal managers and other authorities with the essential data needed to effectively safeguard our coast.

The National Ocean and Coastal Monitoring and Research System will assist us to:

- Respond efficiently in protecting coastal communities from natural disasters,
- It will identify conditions that are dangerous for existing and new marine-dependent industries,
- It will assist us to plan our coastal zones better for the long-term sea-level rise,
- It will provide important data to allow us to respond more effectively to oil spill disasters,
- And it will identify hotspots of poor coastal water quality so that the appropriate management interventions can be implemented.

I am positive that the new system will make a significant contribution to our understanding of the oceans and its health. Without this basic understanding it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to plan for a future in which our oceans are seen as playing a more economically productive role in the lives and well-being of our citizens.

There is a direct link between the South African coast and the imminent threats from the Southern Ocean as a result of climate change. It is imperative that we therefore also study processes in the deeper ocean, especially the Southern Ocean and Antarctica. In addition to the monitoring system I have mentioned earlier, the Department will strive to optimally utilise our current research infrastructure such as the SA Agulhas II, the research base on Marion Island as well as the Antarctic base to further the local knowledge supporting focussed science of national interest.

Ladies and gentlemen, I must as a matter of fact report that the department through its Social Responsibility Programme has once again invested an amount of 235 million over the period of three years in 27 Working for the Coast Projects which are implemented in all 4 coastal provinces of our country. These projects are mainly focused on cleaning the coast, dune rehabilitation and maintenance of coastal infrastructure. This is in response to the calls for safeguarding the benefits derived from our coastal environment and pushing back the frontiers of poverty.

Labour intensive methods are being used in executing these projects which has helped to a greater extent in creating work opportunities for our local people. As we are gathered here today, we are joined by the workers who are employed in one of these projects – the Working for the Coast Project which covers the coastal area from Keiskamma River to Kei Mouth, cutting across Buffalo City Metro Municipality and Great Kei Local

Municipality. This project in particular has a budget of R11 million and has created work opportunities for 110 people living in the area. We are certain that for them "today is better than yesterday, and tomorrow looks even better than today". They earn an income and receive a variety of training interventions which enables them to put food on the tables and prepares them for future employment once the project is completed.

Programme Director, we live in a world where the pressures that we are placing on the environment are reaching a tipping point. I am especially concerned about the threat which pollution poses to the productivity of our marine environment. In January this year I had the honour of attending a major UN inter-governmental conference to discuss what action is needed to tackle the causes of poor coastal water quality. At that particular meeting, which was attended by 65 countries, it was unanimously agreed that we should step up our efforts to tackle the damaging effects of sewage, marine litter and nutrients on our oceans.

South Africa has a coastline of over 3,000km with hundreds of beaches set aside for the public's enjoyment and recreation. Our beaches are much sought-after by both South Africans and international visitors and are a major economic driver in the country's ever growing tourism industry. As a country therefore, we stand much to lose if we do not ensure that our beach waters are protected from pollution, because ultimately that pollution will affect us and our economy.

Programme Director, this brings me to the second important reason why we have gathered here today. It gives me great pleasure to be able to use this auspicious occasion of the World Oceans Day to officially launch South Africa's new recreational coast water quality guidelines. Up until today, there has not been enough information to assist coastal municipalities in their task of maintaining safe beach water quality. The Department has noted the challenge, and in 2010 undertook a study in consultation with local authorities, to identify coastal water quality targets that are scientifically defensible and easy to use. Ladies and gentlemen I believe our new guidelines will assist coastal municipalities to proactively assess their beach water quality and to provide the public with the necessary water quality information so that they can enjoy the coast in a safe manner. These new guidelines, if implemented effectively, will position South Africa among the leading countries in coastal water quality management.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, as we prepare to unveil our new guidelines I would like to call upon all those involved in coastal water quality management to join me to committing to a cleaner, healthier ocean for the betterment of our country. The task of protecting our oceans is not only an issue of conservation alone. For if we consider

the many benefits we derive from the ocean and its opportunities, it is an issue of survival. I thank you all for choosing to spend this special day with us and I would like to appeal that we all strive to live the theme we have chosen – let us learn about the ocean because it is only through learning and understanding that we can come to safeguard its benefits.

I thank you.