



IORA Round Up 2015

2015 has been a year with commendable achievements for the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and one of the busiest years in IORA's history. Projects were implemented in all six priority areas, namely (i) maritime safety and security, (ii) trade and investment facilitation, (iii) fisheries management, (iv) disaster risk management, (v) academic, science and technology cooperation, and (vi) tourism and cultural exchanges, as well as blue economy, and women's economic empowerment as a crosscutting issue.

The 15th IORA Council of Ministers Meeting (COM) held on 23 October 2015 in Padang, Indonesia marked the handing over of IORA Chairmanship from Australia to Indonesia for a period of two years (2015- 2017). During its chairmanship, Indonesia will focus on promoting peace stability and security in the Indian Ocean region by embracing the theme "Strengthening Maritime Cooperation in a Peaceful and Stable Indian Ocean".

The COM in Padang also approved Indonesian proposal to conduct the First IORA Summit in March 2017 taking the momentum 20th Anniversary of IORA, and endorsed the flagship projects the "IORA Concord" to be signed by IORA Heads of Government at the above Summit.

On this occasion, South Africa assumed the role of the Vice-Chair and it is noteworthy to mention that the Federal Republic of Somalia has been accepted as the 21st Member of the Association and the Federal Republic of Germany as the 7th Dialogue Partner.

Blue Economy, the key to sustainable harnessing of our ocean

The importance of the Indian Ocean as the primary link between all Member States was the centre of attention more than ever, particularly with the increasing interest of the Blue Economy sector. The First IORA Ministerial Blue Economy Conference (BEC) was held in Mauritius on 3 September 2015 where the Blue Economy Declaration was adopted. Reflecting on the global trends, this declaration seeks to harness oceans and maritime resources to drive economic growth, job creation and innovation, while safeguarding sustainability and environmental protection.

Although, the key focus in 2015 was on fisheries and aquaculture; renewable ocean energy; seaports and shipping; and seabed exploration and minerals, the future areas of interest of the blue economy would be on marine biotechnology, research and development, as well as on tourism and ocean knowledge clusters. Concrete project proposals resulting from the first ministerial are already under consideration by Member States and with regard to that, it is undeniable that the blue economy shall remain a crucial area of IORA's work for some years to come.

2016 will be a busy year for the blue economy with several projects in the pipeline, particularly with the upcoming Second Blue Economy Conference to be hosted by Indonesia in 2017.

Trade and investment, unleashing the economic potentials of our Member States

Following the successful Economic and Business Conference (EBC-I) held in Mauritius in July 2013, the United Arab Emirates has proposed to host the Second Economic and Business Conference (EBC-II) on 11-13 April 2016. Taking place in Dubai, the gateway to global trade, the Conference would be held in conjunction with the Annual Investment Meeting (AIM), a leading emerging markets foreign direct investment forum that draws over 60 Trade Ministers from around the world and over 10,000 business representatives.

In an attempt to promote and advance engagement of the private sector, the key themes for EBC-II will be Innovation and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Considerable scope exists to strengthen SMEs through improved market information, trade intelligence, access to finance and an enabling business environment.

Enhancing trade and investment will remain high on IORA's agenda for 2016 and the years to come, particularly as it is IORA's core mission to facilitate trade and investment and promoting sustainable economic cooperation within the region.

Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment, the growing commitment of IORA

The critical role that women play in achieving social and economic prosperity across the region has been put forward through several women's economic empowerment events since 2014, and most recently in Seychelles on 24-25 August 2015 which resulted in the Mahé Consensus. IORA is committed to continue efforts and foster new initiatives to advance women's empowerment among its Member States. It was confirmed a women's economic empowerment event will be held each year and in this regard discussions and preparations are already underway for a workshop on building networks for women's economic empowerment through public-private partnerships.

IORA Sustainable Development Programme (ISDP), enabling participation of all Member States

The ISDP was launched in 2014 with the aim to encourage IORA's less developed Member States to actively participate and fully benefit from IORA cooperation through peer-to-peer learning, capacity building, and sharing of best practices. Up to date, two ISDP projects have been organised in Bangladesh and Tanzania on microfinance for economic development and on disaster risk management respectively. More ISDP projects are being planned for 2016, such as the one to be held in Madagascar on marine aquaculture in May 2016.

Tourism and Cultural Exchanges, key to development and prosperity

Tourism being a key driver of socio-economic progress is ranked high on the priority list of Member States. Following the first IORA Tourism Ministerial meeting in Seychelles in 2014, the Second Meeting of Tourism Experts was organised in the margins of INDABA 2015 in South Africa. In addition, linking tourism and cultural exchanges for the first time, a workshop on cultural tourism was hosted by Indonesia in the last quarter of 2015. Tourism and Culture remains an area of interest and would continue to be strengthened. An IORA Tourism Website is under preparation and will be launched in 2016. Moreover, to ensure that tourism plays its role as an engine of sustainable growth, a workshop on Sustainable Tourism Destination Management will be held in Mauritius in 2016.

Maritime Safety and Security, for a peaceful, stable and prosperous Indian Ocean region

Maritime safety and security has historically been an issue of concern in the Indian Ocean region and recently, with increasing maritime activities in the region due to its geostrategic position and growing international interest, IORA is seeking to strengthen maritime cooperation among its Member States. IORA advances maritime security through a number of experts meetings, including one hosted by India in October 2015 and mechanisms such as the Indian Ocean Dialogue (IOD). This 1.5 track forum brought together representatives of strategic and foreign policy communities and civil society and reflects the emergence of a vibrant Indian Ocean community. So far, two Dialogues have been held in Kochi, India in 2014 and Perth, Australia in 2015. A third Dialogue is being planned to be held in Padang, Indonesia in April 2016 together with the 2nd Multilateral Naval Exercise Komodo 2016, International Fleet Review 2016 and 15th Western Pacific Naval Symposium.

Renewable Energy, the innovative energy solution for our Member States

Engaging in sustainable innovations, such as renewable energy for a better future of IORA Members is increasingly becoming a priority for the Association. A follow up IORA expert level workshop on renewable energy will be organised in the margins of the Abu Dhabi Sustainable in January 2016 where the development of a common work programme between IORA and IRENA will be discussed. The work plan is based on the recommendations identified at the First IORA Renewable Energy Ministerial Forum which was held in the United Arab Emirates in January 2014. A priority for this expert level meeting will also be to prepare for the Second IORA Renewable Energy Ministerial Forum scheduled to take place in India in 2016.