

Discussion Session on Improving Scientific Communication and Media-reporting on Marine Resource Management Issues: Minister Aucamp's Statement

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished panel members, scientists, journalists, and partners from industry and civil society — good day.

Firstly, please accept my apology: I would have loved to join you in person, but I am currently on State business with the President in Mozambique.

Let me begin by thanking the organisers of this year's International Stock Assessment Review Workshop with the theme "Improving scientific communication and media reporting on marine resource issues" a topic which could not be more timely. It places communication exactly where it belongs: at the heart of how we protect and manage our oceans.

Our oceans are not just vast stretches of water on a map — they are part of South Africa's identity. They connect us to the world. They are home to a rich and remarkable marine life, a lifeline for our biodiversity. And, of course, they support countless South Africans through fishing, tourism, and trade. The ocean is part of our heritage, our resilience, and our story as a nation.

Because of this, caring for our oceans is non-negotiable. It is central to South Africa's growth, to our future, and to the wellbeing of generations to come. But the science behind ocean management only makes a real difference when people understand it and trust it.

And that is where things get tricky. Marine science is complex. Stock assessments, shifting ecosystems, catch limits, and risk calculations are not easy concepts to digest. Yet they guide every decision we make, from how much fish can be caught, to when seasons should close, to how we help a species recover. When these ideas are misunderstood, whether because they are oversimplified or intentionally distorted, the consequences are serious. Public trust erodes. Coastal communities suffer. And misinformation spreads faster than facts, especially on social media where sensational stories often drown out accurate ones. This isn't just a communications problem — it becomes a governance problem.

South Africa is no stranger to this challenge. At times, decisions about catch limits or rebuilding stocks are misrepresented by those who select only the pieces of science to support a particular argument. Advocacy and public engagement are important; they keep environmental issues in the spotlight but they must be rooted in credible, evidence-based information. Otherwise, we risk weakening trust in the very scientific systems designed to protect our marine resources.

That's why strengthening scientific communication must remain a priority. Our science must not only be correct — it must be clear. We need accessible summaries of stock

assessments, more visual explanations, and more proactive engagement with the media before misinformation takes hold. We must make sure that balanced, factual information reaches communities faster than misleading claims.

The presence of this international panel reminds us that these challenges are shared globally. Fisheries managers everywhere are grappling with how to explain uncertainty without creating doubt, and how to maintain trust in science in a world full of competing narratives. We welcome your experience and your advice on how best to communicate risk, stock status, and scientific recommendations in ways that strengthen transparency and public confidence.

In closing, our goal is simple: not just to produce good science, but to make sure good science is understood. Only then can our marine resources be managed wisely, sustainably, and with the trust of the people who depend on them. I remain committed to strengthening the way we communicate science and ensuring that our work speaks clearly to all South Africans.

I wish you all the best in your deliberations this week. Thank you.