

## Introductory Key Note

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State of Fear or State of Oblivion? What coastal zones are telling us about global change and why we need integrated ocean and coastal management on a global scale?

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### Abstract

Globally, our coastal zones and oceans are providing significant evidence of the reality of climatic change and global warming. Yet we are still a long way from approaching an effective regime for managing ocean and coastal resources. Despite mounting evidence, there is still a great deal of skepticism in the general public and in politicians and decision-makers about the reality of global climate change, and about the sensitivity of the world's oceans and coasts to such change. In his 2004 novel *State of Fear*, Michael Crichton uses his significant talents as a writer of commercial fiction to take on those who believe that global environmental change, and global warming in particular, is being caused significantly by human activities. Furthermore, Crichton launches a vigorous attack on key environmental principles, such as sustainable development and the precautionary approach. Are environmentalists creating a "state of fear" about the impacts of human activity, or are politicians and decision-makers living in a state of oblivion about human potential to inflict significant changes on the global climatic system.

What has a commercial work of fiction to do with us? Surely scientists and serious researchers should not need to concern ourselves with such trivia. Nothing could be further from the truth. We must understand that popular literature has a huge impact upon perceptions and opinions. As we come together in organizations such as ICES, we must look at how we can communicate our knowledge, expertise, and insights to the broader community, and not just to our academic and scientific peers. This is no doubt a dilemma to all of us who have been trained to speak to and be judged by our colleagues.

The importance of this dilemma for ocean and coastal scientists and managers is significant, given the propensity of these natural systems to respond to environmental changes and the potential impacts upon huge concentrations of the world's population. While the scientific evidence has become increasingly overwhelming, the

management response has been significantly less than stellar. True, we have made significant advances in ocean and coastal management over the past decades, but not nearly enough considering the level of risk for resources, environments, and people alike. As scientists and researchers, we have a responsibility to step beyond the academic boundaries of our expertise and contribute in a serious manner to the public debate about global climate change, its impacts on oceans and coasts, and the need to manage human actions and activities accordingly.

The Coastal Zone Canada Association has worked to bridge the gap between science and policy and create a meaningful dialogue between the wide range of stakeholders in the coastal zone. Since its creation in 1993, the Association has seen some success in influencing Canadian public policy on ICZM, and provides one example for other scientific organizations to use their collective expertise to influence public policy. However, we have failed to influence public opinion in any significant way and remain susceptible to the swings of public support for serious action on environmental issues. In promoting marine research, organizations such as ICES must also engage in the broader debate of influencing public opinion and public policy to promote ICZM. We cannot simply continue to talk to ourselves as scientists and researchers and we must be prepared to engage in the broader debate that we have traditionally left to others. We have a responsibility to take our knowledge and our expertise beyond the limits of our scientific community and into the realm of public debate.

In Canada, coastal zones have been and continue to be impacted severely by environmental change. This has helped promote government action towards ICZM, starting with the passage of the Oceans Act in 1997 and then the implementation of the Oceans Action Plan in 2004. Similarly, the Government of Canada ratified the Kyoto Accord in 2003 and was developing plan of action, albeit belated, to reduce carbon emissions. However, the election of a minority Conservative government following thirteen years of successive Liberal governments brought a considerable chill to the development of environmental policy. Now as public opinion has turned once again towards highlighting the environment, and “recovering politicians” such as former US Vice-President Al Gore are promoting action on global warming, what future lies for ICZM and what role should scientists and researchers play in this movement to mobilize action to address?

Does the world live in a state of fear or a state of oblivion? Or do we want to live in a state of awareness, reason, and responsibility? Do we even think it our responsibility to do anything about it? The challenge of this keynote address is that it is our responsibility and that we must care enough to take action collectively.