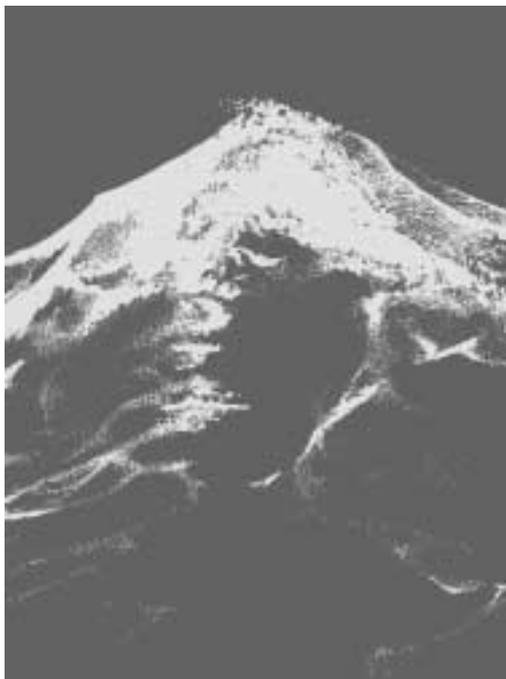


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Dr Marjorie Courtenay-Latimer, special guest on the opening day of the 6th Indo-Pacific Fish Conference, reminiscing about her role in the 1938 discovery of the first coelacanth known to science.

Left to right: Dr Courtenay-Latimer, Dr Paul Skelton (Director: JLB Smith Institute), Dr Lynnath Beckley (Chairperson: 6<sup>th</sup> IPFC) and Dr Jack Randall (invited plenary speaker).

(Photo: Rudy van der Elst)

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## PREFACE

The vast Indo-Pacific region supports a huge diversity of marine fishes that has attracted the attention of ichthyologists for many years. The systematics, biology and ecology of these fishes have been the subject matter of a series of Indo-Pacific Fish Conferences which commenced in Sydney in 1981. Subsequently, at four yearly intervals, successive conferences have been held in Tokyo, Wellington, Bangkok and Noumea. The 6th Indo-Pacific Fish Conference was held in Durban, South Africa on the shores of the Indian Ocean from 20-25<sup>th</sup> May 2001. It attracted 250 delegates from 34 countries, many of whom were visiting Africa for the first time. The conference was hosted by the Oceanographic Research Institute, in collaboration with the Natal Sharks Board, the JLB Smith Institute of Ichthyology (now the South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity) and the South African Museum.

The 213 papers on offer at the conference were arranged in nine symposia and presented in plenary, parallel and poster sessions. *Coastal and Reef Fishes* was the largest symposium with papers covering an array of topics such as biodiversity of Western Indian Ocean reef fishes (including coelacanths), age and growth, reproduction and spawning aggregations, feeding ecology, fish behaviour and the impacts of factors such as coral bleaching on fish diversity. The *Systematics* symposium covered a range of reef and shelf taxa while the *Deep-sea Fishes* and *Pelagic Fishes* symposia included oceanic species. The *Marine Protected Areas* symposium dealt with coastal fish conservation in countries as diverse as Australia, Philippines, Egypt, Kenya and South Africa. The *Estuarine Fishes* symposium highlighted fish community structure and biogeography as well as the role of estuaries as nursery areas. The *Larval Fishes* symposium included descriptions of eggs and larvae, larval distribution, settlement patterns and larval behaviour. The *Chondrichthyan Fishes* symposium addressed the systematics of sharks and rays as well as the biology and ecology of several species. The *Reproductive Mechanisms* symposium dealt specifically with the reproduction of sharks and their relatives and the micro-anatomy of their reproductive systems.

In view of the current international debate about the use of molecular and morphological characteristics in reef fish systematics, a timely discussion session on this topic was convened during the conference. Further, taking advantage of the gathering of so many ichthyologists, open meetings of the IUCN Shark Specialist Group and the Society for the Conservation of Reef Fish Aggregations were also held during evening sessions.

The conference was, by and large, funded by the registration fees of the delegates although the South African Association for Marine Biological Research made a major contribution by covering the salaries of Oceanographic Research Institute staff while they organised the conference. The Natal Sharks Board, JLB Smith Institute of Ichthyology, South African Museum and University of Natal also contributed the time of some staff members to assist with the smooth running of the conference. The international Scientific Committee for Oceanic Research, the Marine Science Society of South Africa and the South African National Research Foundation made financial contributions towards the attendance of some delegates, notably students and scientists from developing countries.

The papers included in this proceedings volume have all been peer-reviewed in the normal manner prescribed by the journal. They represent about a quarter of those presented at the conference and, for completeness, the full scientific programme is appended at the back of the volume.

The next Indo-Pacific Fish Conference is scheduled to be held in 2005 in Taiwan. I encourage you to attend and foster the tradition of excellent science combined with congenial camaraderie that has become the signature of Indo-Pacific Fish Conferences.

Dr Lynnath Beckley  
Chairperson: 6th IPFC Organising Committee