

EcoPlata 2001
"Gestión Integrada de la Zona Costera Uruguaya del Río de la Plata"
Montevideo, May 14, 2001

Notes for an address by
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Muy buenos días.

Es para mi un gran placer estar nuevamente aqui en Montevideo. Esta es una ciudad encantadora situada sobre la margen de uno de los estuarios mas impresionantes del mundo. Montevideo y Punta del Este son conocidos internacionalmente por la belleza de su entorno costero. Es muy oportuno que nos reunamos aqui para reflexionar conjuntamente sobre este entorno y los esfuerzos realizados durante la última década para estudiarlo y protegerlo. El proyecto EcoPlata es un importante vehículo creado para ejecutar estas actividades.

It is a very great pleasure to be here in Montevideo once again. This is a delightful city situated on one of the world's most magnificent estuaries. As you know it, and its sister city of Punta del Este, are known worldwide for their beautiful maritime settings. It is appropriate that we should meet here today to reflect on that setting and the efforts that have been expended over the past decade to study and protect it. The Ecoplata project is an important vehicle that was created to carry out these activities.

Ecoplata had its origins in 1992 with a visit to Canada by the Uruguayan President. At that time he expressed concern about the well being of Uruguay's marine environment, and especially about the need to educate and train young Uruguayans to take on future management responsibilities.

That visit to Canada led to a return visit by Canadians and the rest, as they say, is history.

Additional visits to both countries resulted in a common understanding of the problems plus strong interpersonal relationships that often are the basis for genuine cooperation and collaboration. What has emerged from these early beginnings is a true international partnership that has become well known outside of Uruguay as an initiative that is well directed, that has already accomplished a great deal and which holds considerable promise for the future.

Since 1992 Ecoplata has involved more than 100 Uruguayan researchers drawn from four separate institutions: SOHMA, INAPE, the Faculty of Science and the Ministry of the Environment. To date three distinct phases of activity have occurred. Each successive phase has drawn in more people, broadened the institutional base and addressed increasingly more complex issues. The current phase of Ecoplata which will end shortly, and which is being celebrated by this conference, has achieved some important successes such as a complete diagnostic assessment of the entire coastline, the creation of pilot projects to engage researchers and citizens working toward the delineation of important issues, eventually leading to planning and policy considerations. The success of this program has not gone unnoticed in international circles. Many are aware of the working relationships that have been created and nurtured between researchers, institutions, regulatory agencies, the government and the public. These successes establish Uruguay at the cutting edge in the practice and implementation of integrated coastal zone management.

IDRC is extremely proud to be a partner in this process. However, successful as it has been considerable work remains. The threat to coastal zones worldwide is growing, due to a number of factors such as climate change, growing population pressure and increased economic activity.

Therefore true success must be measured, not by the creation of individual projects but rather by the creation of appropriate infrastructure that will transcend any single project, researcher or funding source. Institutionalizing the Ecoplata concept will encourage policy-relevant research, community consultation, strong government participation and eventually the creation of appropriate policy tools for coastal zone governance. Only then will the job be considered complete.

In that vein I wish to publicly announce the availability of additional funding to the Ecoplata program in order that it might fully realize its goals and potential. This funding will permit the necessary planning and partnership development that are essential to create an institutional presence that will enjoy a lasting legacy.

Since Ecoplata has been a partnership from the beginning it is important that the available IDRC funds be matched by an appropriate Uruguayan contribution to the program. In that way the resources available will be further enhanced but more importantly it demonstrates tangible evidence of the strong commitment felt by both parties. That commitment is an essential prerequisite when approaching additional international funding organizations to consider also becoming members of this partnership. I am very optimistic that a strong Uruguayan commitment, coupled with a well defined plan for the future, will produce positive results.

I will close now by once again offering my congratulations to all the participants of the Ecoplata initiative for a job well done. IDRC is proud to have been associated with these activities to date

and looks forward to a continuing involvement through our regional office as well as the continuing involvement of Canadian researchers.

Good Luck.