

ICMM CONGRESS 2009 – OPENING SPEECHES

Danish Minister of Culture, Ms Carina Christensen

If a country's cultural heritage had a colour – Denmark's would be blue!

Although we - in a historical perspective at least - are used to looking at ourselves as a land of farmers and craftsmen, many of us carry a strong sentiment of connectedness to the sea. Because we live right next to it; Because we pass it or cross it whenever we travel more than a few kilometres; Or because we know or sense that in our history - through wars, trade and the use of the sea's natural resources - the sea has had an immense importance in defining this country's size, wealth and mental outlook.

In this way, the sea is a powerful agent in our history and an important framework for understanding culture and society. Even today. That is - of course - true for many other nations. That's why The Fisheries and Maritime Museum and ICMM have gathered close to a hundred delegates from every continent in the world here in Esbjerg for the ICMM 2009 Congress. To continue the discussion of how the world's maritime museums can sustain and develop their relevance as centres of knowledge on maritime history and globalization in the future.

Under the heading 'Understanding Change – Coping with Uncertainty' the congress will discuss issues related to some of every museum's core purposes. And among them: A changing audience. Are the museums

getting the maritime message across? And is anyone listening? These questions are important for all museums.

As Danish Minister of Culture, I am very concerned that all museums master the difficult task of communicating their knowledge to a wide audience. Especially to those who never - or almost never - visit museums. Maritime museums have a unique potential - and therefore a special obligation - to do just that.

Why?

The sea and the maritime life evolving around it is not only an agent in history or a framework for understanding society today. It is also an incredibly interesting and fascinating world of its own. A world of small and heavy industry, of underwater sea life and cities and even countries arising and declining at its bay. Culture is for everybody. And these stories are immensely powerful and relevant to many more people than are gathered here.

There is no better place in Denmark than here in Esbjerg to host this congress. Although Esbjerg's history is short - less than 150 years - the city has established itself as a lively industrial and cultural centre with a huge capacity to transform itself. From being Denmark's largest fishing harbour - to its new status as the country's main city for offshore activities including oil and wind power industries.

And I can think of no better host for this congress than The Fisheries and Maritime Museum! The museum has an international reputation as an important research centre and as a rallying point for international co-operation – especially around the North Sea. What’s more - the museum has an annual number of visitors of more than 150.000 proving the museum’s outstanding ability to attract a large and interested audience.

I would like to thank Morten Hahn-Pedersen, the museum and ICMM for their joint effort to further developing the roles and relevance of maritime museums.

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**Erik Clausen Chairman of the Fisheries and Maritime Museum,
Esbjerg**

Today the Fisheries and Maritime Museum is recognized as a museum of national importance and a player on the international maritime museum scene. At the same time the museum is closely connected to the city in which it is located. Indeed the museum owes its very existence to the City of Esbjerg.

On occasion of the centenary of the founding of the Esbjerg Harbour the City erected the new museum as a gift to the citizens of Esbjerg. On opening in 1968 the museum could be described as a Fisheries Museum with an aquarium attached to it. The entire focus was pointed at the fishery nationwide, which was perfectly natural in a city with one of the

largest fishing harbours in Europe. At that time the fishing fleet of Esbjerg counted more than 600 vessels, and fishery plus related industries were a dominant part of business in Esbjerg.

However, over the years the structure of the fishery changed from many small to a very few, but very large units. Today the number of Danish fishermen is less than the number of fishermen in 1970 Esbjerg – and in Esbjerg the entire fishing fleet is 14 vessels.

Had the Fisheries and Maritime kept the original focus it is hard to say what the museum would have been like today. However, the museum understood the changes that was going on and was able to cope with the uncertainty by developing a new concept and turning the focus of the museum towards the theme "Man and Sea" which is today presented to our visitors in as many aspects as possible; fishery, shipping, offshore oil and gas, offshore windfarms, coastal culture, leisure and tourism, the waddensea, environment, marine mammals and marine biology. The museum presentations are based on solid research which since 1994 has been carried out by the Centre of Maritime and Regional Studies – a joint venture between the museum and the University of Southern Denmark.

The overall work method has been step wise development in building up the museum, research centre and attraction that the Fisheries and Maritime Museum is today. As Chairman I am proud of the achievements made so far and I am looking forward to seeing the next steps of our plans be launched in the years to come.

Over the years we have had the privilege of a fantastic support from the City of Esbjerg, the Danish Cultural Heritage Agency and the Danish State. We are of course very grateful indeed for the support that has been extremely valuable for the development of the museum. But I am also very much aware that without the flow of inspiration and the fantastic support and cooperation that Morten and his staff have had via a solid international network, we might not have been where we are today. The Chairman and the Board of this museum fully support the international work in which our staff is engaged – also when it comes to a time consuming job as President for ICMM. In the end the museum gains from the valuable network and contacts created by this kind of work.

The world around all of us is constantly changing and uncertainty is a condition of life. This is not least true when it comes to the maritime world. We all have challenges ahead of us – but challenges can be overcome – especially when you are understanding change, coping with uncertainty and working together by exchanging thoughts and ideas as you will in this conference.