MULTIPLE USE MANAGEMENT OF NATURAL FORESTS AND WOODLANDS: POLICY REFINEMENTS AND SCIENTIFIC PROGRESS

NATURAL FORESTS AND SAVANNA WOODLANDS SYMPOSIUM IV

15 – 18 May 2006

Port Elizabeth

Organised by the **Department of Water Affairs and Forestry**
and co-hosted by **South African National Parks.**

Photos by Marius Du Toit, Hylton Herd

and Christian Loos

Multiple Use Management of Natural Forests and Woodlands: Policy Refinements and Scientific Progress

NATURAL FORESTS AND SAVANNA WOODLANDS
SYMPOSIUM IV

SYMPOSIUM
PROCEEDINGS

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Compilation: Merle Falken Inclusive
Front cover design: Pencil Box Studios
Cover photos: I. J. van der Merwe

Published: 2007

DEPARTMENT OF WATER AFFAIRS AND FORESTRY
PRETORIA

FOREWORD

Worldwide there is a changing trend in forestry, where the relative importance of timber as a forest product is being counterbalanced by greater recognition of the importance of non-timber forest products, previously referred to as 'minor forest products,' as well as greater recognition of the environmental service values of forests. There is also a trend towards greater participation of society and in particular local communities, in forest management and decisions regarding forest resources. These trends are now well recognized in South Africa. In fact the national forest policy already recognized these trends in the mid 1990s and made provision for a more inclusive concept of forestry. Whereas commercial timber yields from natural forests and woodlands are negligible in this country, it is the local consumptive use of wood, e.g. as fuel, fencing and building material and the consumptive use and trade in non-timber forest products that are important facets of the use of our natural forests and woodlands. This puts the natural forests and woodlands in South Africa at the forefront of the changing face of forestry in South Africa.

The proceedings of the Fourth Natural Forests and Woodlands Symposium presented here, reflect these trends. In presenting this series of symposia, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry endeavours to promote the sustainable use and management of South Africa's natural forest resources. This symposium, like the previous ones, provided a platform for interaction among researchers from various institutions, forestry and related environmental professionals, policymakers and administrators. The symposium thus provided an opportunity for presentation of the latest research and identification of research needs and opportunities. The symposium also provided an important forum where progress with policy implementation could be discussed and at the same time provided policy practitioners the opportunity to reflect on policy needs, as it emerge from research findings.

There is gradual progress towards the implementation of forest policy as it pertains to woodlands. Engagement with this issue and application of legal provisions for natural forests and woodlands highlighted the question of definition of forest types and specifically the differentiation between woodlands, thicket and natural forests. With the geographic centre of gravity of the Thicket Biome located in the Eastern Cape, this symposium gave some attention to the question of broad classification and particularly its legal implications. Other policy questions that came under the spotlight, centred on the sustainability of the utilisation of forest products and possible management systems that could enhance sustainable use. From a policy point of view the symposium generally reaffirmed the importance of natural forests and woodlands as a resource for supplementing the livelihoods of rural and urban people in South Africa.

Although environmental service values of forest resources were addressed during the symposium, it is believed that this may be a field of greater emphasis in future. Some of the papers presented, and included in the proceedings, reveal new insights into the evolution of forest biodiversity in South Africa. The question of forest ecosystem resilience becomes a critical one with the advent of worldwide concern about the possible impacts of climate change and the role of forests in its mitigation. These are themes that deserve further research and discussion during future symposia, the need for which was widely affirmed by the audience of this symposium.

In presenting the proceedings of this symposium, the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry hopes to provide a resource that will strengthen the scientific management of our natural forest and woodland resources and enhance their contribution towards the livelihoods of the people of this country. Hopefully the symposium itself and the publication of the proceedings contributes towards further education in forestry and raising greater awareness of the importance of the forests among the public. Contributions from scientists outside South Africa are gratefully acknowledged. The support from South African National Parks in preparation for the symposium, hosting the field excursion and contributing towards the proceedings is highly appreciated. The Department also acknowledges and thank the organisers, Merle Falken Inclusive, for their dedicated service.

NATURAL FORESTS AND WOODLANDS SYMPOSIUM IV

Table of Contents

Foreword i

Opening Address and Welcome viii
Mrs. Linda Mossop-Rousseau : Chief Director: Forestry
on behalf of Minister Buyelwa Sonjica (MP), Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry

Section 1: Natural Forests: Scientific Contributions

Impacts on Forests and Rehabilitation (Chair: Mr. Winston Smit)

Growth and mortality of Knysna Forest over the 1990's: no signs yet of negative impacts of global change 2
Prof Jeremy J. Midgley and Dr A.H.W. Seydack (University of Cape Town, Cape Town)

Current population structure of mangroves from Mlalazi to Mtamvuna in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa 5
Ms. Anusha Rajkaran and Prof. J. Adams (Nelson Mandela Metropolitain Univeristy, Port Elizabeth)

Forest rehabilitation programme: Table Mountain National Park 18
Ms. Mbalenhle Mthetwa and Mr. P. Gordon (SANParks, Cape Town)
[Paper was withdrawn by authors]

Regeneration Ecology (Chair: Mr. Graham von Maltitz)

Multi-stemmed trees in subtropical coastal dune forest: survival strategy in response to chronic disturbance 19
Dr. Megan Griffiths, Mr. E. F. Nzunda and Prof. M. J. Lawes (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg)

Regeneration failure and the *Acacia karoo* successional pathway in coastal dune forests in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa 26
Ms. Lauren Boyes, Prof. M. J. Lawes and Dr. M. Griffiths (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg)

The monocarpic herb, *Isoglossa woodii*, influences subtropical forest tree dynamics and diversity 33
Prof. Mike Lawes, Mr. Z. Tsvuura and Dr. M. Griffiths (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg)

Demographic patterns of stinkwood (*Ocotea bullata*) in the forests of at Weza, KwaZulu-Natal: Divergent modes of regeneration 38
Dr. Armin Seydack, Mr. W.J. Vermeulen, Mr. J. Baard and Mr. R.H. Kok (SANParks, Knysna)

Does harvesting understorey trees affect the maintenance of tree diversity? …… 44
Prof. Mike Lawes and Mr. S. Boudreau (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg)

Ecology and Management of Bark Harvesting (Chair: Dr. Frank Matose)

Response of different species on bark harvesting for traditional medicine in Southern Africa …… 55
Prof. Coert J. Geldenhuys, Mr. S. Syampunghani, Mr. G. Meke and Mr. W. J. Vermeulen (University of Stellenbosch and Forestwood CC, Pretoria)

Recovery of the medicinal tree after debarking in the Monts Kouffé woodland of Benin (West Africa) ……... 63
Ms. Claire Delvaux, Prof. B. Sinsin and Prof. P. van Damme (University of Gent, Gent, Belgium)

Developing a basis for management of natural populations of *Drimys brasiliensis* in Brazil, used for its bark ……... 76
Mr. Alexandre Mariot, Prof. M. S. Dos Reis and Prof. A. Mantovani (Nucleo de Pesquisas em Florestas Tropicais & Universidade Federal de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, Brazil)

Sustainable bark harvesting for medicinal use: matching species to prescriptions ……..… 82
Mr. Wessel J. Vermeulen (SANParks, Knysna)

Genetic variation in *Warburgia ugandensis* and implications its cultivation …… 90
Ms. Lydia Wamalwa (Kenya Forest Research Institute, Nairobi, Kenya)

The *Pinus patula* plantation … a nursery for natural forest seedlings …….. 94
Prof. Coert J. Geldenhuys and Ms C. Delvaux (University of Stellenbosch and Forestwood CC, Pretoria)

Forest Fauna (Chair: Ms. Susan Steyn)

Resilient forest faunal communities in South Africa: a legacy of paleoclimatic change and extinction filtering? ……..….. 108
Dr. Harriet A. C. Eeley, Prof. M. J. Lawes, Ms. N. J. Findlay and Mr. D. Forbes (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg)

Effects of domestic stock browsing in the Bosberg Afromontane Forest ……..... 119
Mr. Hylton Herd and Dr. L. H. Watson (SANParks, Knysna)

Working with factors affecting the natural forest habitat of the Cape Parrot …… 133
Ms. Catherine L. Henderson (Birdlife South Africa, Harrismith)

Section 2: Woodlands: Scientific Contributions

Woodland Extent and Definition (Chair: Mr. Tom Vorster)

Monitoring woodlands from space: the possible role of modern remote sensing & geo-informatics in monitoring of southern African woodlands and indigenous Forests ……..… 141
Prof. Christoph Kätch (University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch)

Interrelationships between savanna and forest biomes and soil formation in the summer rainfall region of South Africa …….. 151
Mr. Anton Kunneke and Dr. F. Ellis (University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch)
[Paper was not submitted for publication]

Applying legal definitions and scientific classifications to woody biomes: complexities of nature pose a dilemma for practical enforcement of forest law …… 152
Mr. Theo Stehle and Mrs. C. Vermeulen (Department of Water Affairs & Forestry, Knysna)

Savanna Dynamics (Chair: Prof. Mike Lawes)

A framework for understanding elephant effects on woodlands …….. 163
Dr. Rina Grant, D. Balfour, M. Hofmeyr and L Kruger (SANParks, Kruger National Park)

Slowly does it: *Acacia erioloba* growing large in the southern Kalahari …….. 175
Ms. Colleen Seymour (University of Cape Town, Cape Town)

Demographics and dynamics of commonly harvested woody species in protected indigenous forests in Zimbabwe …… 183
Mr. John Mudekwe (National University of Science and Technology, Harare, Zimbabwe)

A new explanation for increasing woody biomass in the arid and semi-arid regions …... 179
Dr. Anthony Palmer (Agriculture Research Council, Grahamstown)
[Paper was not submitted for publication]

Influence of community based natural resources management (CBNRM) strategies in conservation of natural ecosystems: the management of anthropogenic disturbance …… 198
Dr. Phosiso Sola (Southern Alliance for Indigenous Resources, Harare, Zimbabwe)

Rehabilitation (Chair: Mrs. Cobri Vermeulen)

Carbon sequestration and restoration: Challenges and opportunities in subtropical thicket …….. 214
Mr. Mike Powell, Dr. A. Mills and Dr. C. Marais (Subtropical Thicket Rehabilitation Project, Patensie)

Impacts of acid mine drainage on the regeneration potential of highveld phreatophytes …….. 224
Ms. Isabel Weiersbye and Prof. E.T.F. Witkowski, (University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg)

Acid mine drainage and phreatophyte vegetation: Biogeochemical cycling of pollutants by phreatophyte vegetation on acid mine drainage: implications for land – use planning …….. 238
Ms. Isabel Weiersbye, Prof. E.M. Cukrowska, Mr. N. Margalit, Mr. T. Feingersh, Mr. G. Revivo, Dr. O. Braun, Dr. R. Stark and Mr. Y. Zur. (University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg)
[Paper was not submitted for publication]

Hydrological Links (Chair: Dr. Paxie Chirwa)

Dead or alive! What is happening to the Nyl floodplain? 239
Dr. Wynand Vlok, J.H.J van Vuuren, C.L. Cook, R.G. Greenfield, D. Hoare and J. Victor (University of Limpopo, Polokwane)

Systemic links between society, wetlands and woodlands – the Bushbuckridge Case 245
Dr. Harry Biggs, Dr. S. Pollard and Mr. D. du Toit (SANParks, Kruger National Park),

Water use measurements of selected woodland tree species within the Kruger National Park 256
Mr. Mark Gush and Dr. P Dye (CSIR, Pietermaritzburg)

Section 3: Policy Development and Implementation: Natural Forests and Savanna Woodlands

Policy & Regulation (Chair: Prof. Christoph Kätch)

The development and implementation of the Compliance and Enforcement Policy for the National Forests Act, 1998(Act No. 84 of 1998) and the National Veld and Forest Fire Act, 1998, (Act No. 101 0f 1998) 267
Mr. JJ. Le Roux (Directorate Forestry Regulation, Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Pretoria)

Moving forward with woodlands: the progress and process of giving effect to the mandate of the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry 271
Mr. Johan Bester , (Directorate Forestry Policy & Strategy, Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Pretoria)

Co – Management of Natural Forests and Woodlands (Chair: Ms. Isabel Weiersbye)

The role of traditional authority in the use and management of forest resources at Ongoye forest 283
Mr. Lehlohonolo J. Phadima and Prof. M.J. Lawes (University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg)

The mangrove forests of Mngazana: securing their future through co – management ... 289
Ms. Fonda Lewis (Institute of Natural Resources, Pietermaritzburg)

The effects of participatory forest management on a forest – margin community in the Southern Cape Forests: a case study of Covie 294
Dr. Scotney Watts and T.N. Holmes-Watts (University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch)

Co-management options for reserved forest in Zimbabwe and beyond: policy implications of forest management strategies 309
Dr. Frank Matose, Mr. W. Kozanayi and Ms. T. Mutimukuru (Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies, University of the Western Cape, Cape Town)
[paper was not submitted for publication]

What role should conservation areas play in providing livelihood opportunities to adjacent communities? 310
Mr. Graham von Maltitz and S. Mazibuko (CSIR, Pretoria)

Livelihoods and Poverty Alleviation. (Chair: Mr. Thembelani Ngamile)

How important is the trade in woodland products for livelihoods and poverty alleviation in South Africa? Evidence from four case studies 317
Dr. Sheona Shackleton and Prof. B. Campbell (Dept of Environmental Science, Rhodes University, Grahamstown)

The significance of natural resources to urban households: Implications for bio-cultural diversity in South Africa 341
Ms. Michelle Cocks and Ms. L. Bangay (Institute of Social and Economic Research, Rhodes University, Grahamstown)

Socioeconomic aspects of Miombo woodlands in Malawi. The case of non – timber forest products 356
Dr. Paxie Chirwa, Prof. L. Mwabumba and Prof. M. R. Ngulube, (Department Forestry & Wood Science, University of Stellenbosch, Stellenbosch)

Economic assessment of an alternative livelihood to indigenous forest use by a rural community in KwaZulu-Natal 368
Mr. Steve McKean (Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, Pietermaritzburg)

Section 4: Abstracts of Posters

The use of alien invader plant stands to re-habilitate indigenous forests impacted by bark harvesting 379
Ms. Liezl Bezuidenhout (Working for Water Programme, Bellville)

Plant moisture stress meter – an ideal tool in monitoring the impact of water abstraction on the health of riparian forests, South Africa 379
Mr. Gerhard de Beer (Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Polokwane)

The need for an integrated approach in ecosystem management in the semi-arid region of Limpopo 380
Mr. Gerhard de Beer (Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Polokwane)

The status of Limpopo river vegetation and need for an integrated approach in sustainable development thereof, Limpopo Province 380
Mr. Gerhard de Beer (Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Polokwane)

The impact of elephants (*Loxodonta africana*) on the Limpopo Riparian Forests in the semi-arid region of the Limpopo Province 381
Mr. Gerhard de Beer and L. Burger (Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment and Tourism, Polokwane)

Comparative growth curve analysis of short-clawed (*Centrilauda chuana*) and Sabota Lark (*Mirafra sabota*) nestlings 382
Dr. Derek Engelbrecht and J. Grosel (Department of Physiology and Environmental Health, University of Limpopo, Polokwane)

Understorey gaps influence regeneration dynamics in subtropical coastal dune forest …….. 383
Dr. Megan Griffiths, Prof. M. J. Lawes and Mr. Z Tsvuura (School of Biological and Conservation Sciences, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg)

Systematic conservation planning for the Forest Biome of South Africa: Approach, methods and results of the selection of priority forests for conservation action ……..... 383
Ms Johanna Khumalo and Mr. D Berliner (Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Pretoria)

Review of small-scale fiber craft enterprises in the KwaZulu-Natal woodlands ……..... 384
Mr. Khulile Mavundla, N. Diedericks, C. Ham and F. Theron (FutureWorks!, Everton)

Ecology and conservation of Miombo (*Brachystegia speciformis*) Woodland in the north eastern Soutpansberg, Limpopo Province ……..... 384
Mrs. Tshifhiwa Ramatshimbila and Prof. T. Saidi (Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, Louis Trichardt)

The importance of catchment and upstream management for the conservation of woodlands and forests in the Southern Cape: a case study …… 385
Mr. Jeremy Randall, C. Avierinos and D. Holder (Hill and Associates, George)

Sustainable bark harvesting for medicinal use: Experimental strip harvesting from the southern Cape forests, South Africa …….. 386
Mr. Wessel Vermeulen and Prof. C. Geldenhuys (SANParks, Knysna)

Community Products Network – A support system to aid in the establishment of community based natural resource production systems and tourism…… 386
Mr. Graham von Maltitz and K. Mansfield (CSIR, Pretoria)

A national strategy for invasive alien plant control, with reference to the forest and savanna biomes …… 387
Mr. Andrew Wannenburg (Working for Water Programme, Cape Town)

OPENING ADDRESS AND WELCOME

Mrs. Linda Mossop-Rousseau: Chief Director Forestry on behalf of
Minister Buyelwa Sonjica (MP)
Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry

Delegates, guests and visitors to South Africa, I wish to welcome all of you to this fourth symposium on indigenous forests and woodlands, which is hosted by the Department of Water Affairs and Forestry. A particular welcome goes to our international delegates. Welcome to South Africa, the Eastern Cape and Port Elizabeth in particular. Several of you came to South Africa to share with us your research findings and knowledge about a range of subjects that relate to natural forests and woodlands. Ever since the first symposium in 1998 there had been interest and participation from beyond our borders. We are grateful that this symposium again captured your attention and that you are willing to share with us.

The Natural Forests and Woodland Symposia are presented by the Department to provide an opportunity for leaders in science, new technology and policy opinion leaders to talk to each other and to people who can apply your innovations for the benefit of our society. It is encouraging that a good number of the Department's Forestry staff has registered to attend. Colleagues, this is a valuable opportunity to gain information first hand. Do not let the opportunity pass you by. We also welcome our colleagues from other departments and organisations. Forestry is not the exclusive domain of this Department. There are other organs of State that play a crucial part in the sustainable management of our forests and your presence here is highly relevant. I sincerely hope that it will prove to be worth your while and will exceed your expectations in terms of what you gain from being here. Of course the symposium is about more than the information that is presented, it is also about the networking and linkages that we build. Therefore every participant is important.

It is our purpose with the Symposium to bring people together and create a sense of unity around our common interest in the sustainable management and conservation of our precious forests. This is the fourth symposium of its kind, and I believe that previous symposia were well attended, offered valuable scientific and policy information and helped to strengthen the very important links among researchers, policy developers and implementers. When you look at the proceedings of these symposia, one can see that there are trends on some themes. With the natural forest classification process for example, one sees a progression from its inception at the time of the Second Symposium to the presentation of a proposed system at this symposium. One also sees the progression in terms of our legislative tools that enable us to implement our policies. When the first symposium was hosted in 1998, our two Acts, the National Forest Act and the National Veld and Forest Fire Act were both being finalised. By the time of the third symposium we were looking forward to the release of the first Regulations. Now, at this symposium you will begin to reflect on the legislation, its implementation and some of the results, deficiencies or problems that are being experienced. It is about ten years now since the Forestry White Paper was developed that provided the foundation for the legislation that we currently have. Newly emerging challenges may by now become evident.

All the progress in policy development and implementation of course depends on the valuable research that many of you are doing and information that is shared during these symposia. One can also see a progression in the change of emphasis in research, as reflected in the titles of your presentations. It will be unfortunate if there is no progression. For this reason it is so important for the Department to present this platform where we can all share our work and determine what progress is being made and where the new research needs and opportunities are emerging.

As was done at previous symposia, I wish to use this opportunity to say a few words about developments in the Department.

Restructuring has been mentioned in the past as a priority matter within DWAF. Significant portions of our indigenous forests have been transferred to SANParks since the last symposium as part of this process. Some of our plantation areas along the eastern escarpment of Mpumalanga have also been designated for conversion and rehabilitation to natural vegetation. As such these areas are earmarked for transfer to become part of the Kruger to Canyons conservation corridor initiative. There are still a significant number of natural forests for which the Department remains responsible in the form of State forests. Of course the restructuring process is an ambitious undertaking and it will probably continue for several years to come. There has also been further restructuring within the Department. A most significant development in recent times is that Forestry has been elevated to the status of a full branch within the Department and we are looking forward to the appointment of a Deputy Director General for Forestry within this year.

The department has enjoyed the benefit of international donor support for more than ten years. Much of the restructuring has been supported by these donor agencies, not only through financing, but also through their technical expertise. During the last financial year the donor projects that supported forestry all came to their conclusion. The Department is now on its own. With the departure of the donor agencies we also lost the presence of their staff. Much of the work they have been doing now falls upon our own staff. Even though we are short staffed, we are ambitious in our undertakings. Let us harness the expertise we have and keep up the good work we are doing.

One of our ambitious new undertakings relate to woodlands. This had been an area of little attention for a number of years. However, you will learn through the course of this event that the Department has now approved a strategy and an implementation plan that will guide the roll out of our policy in terms of woodlands. You will realise that your contributions as an academic community had been significant in revealing the importance of woodlands as a forest resource in South Africa. Thus you have shaped our policies and much of the subject specific guidelines pertaining to the management of this forest resource. There is plenty of scientific information available about the woodlands, yet we have to realise that we still don't know as much as we should. So by the time we present the Fifth Symposium we will be looking forward to the new research findings you will be presenting. I hope this symposium will provide you adequate opportunity to set your aims and identify new priority research opportunities. Many of you are already busy with relevant new research and we will be looking forward to the outcomes.

As a research community it will be of interest to you that the Department is in the process of developing a more strategic approach towards supporting and promoting forestry research in South Africa. Our mandate in the legislation is clear. There is a specific task team working on this project and we are looking forward to producing a protocol document and a research strategy that will indicate the Department's role and research priorities. This should also provide direction in terms of the budget provisions needed for research in the short to medium term.

As much as it is important to do research in forestry, it is also important that we develop a human resource base of skilled and capable forestry professionals, not only for the management of the country's commercial forest resources, but also for the indigenous forests and woodlands. It is being realised in the sector that there is a skills shortage developing which may in future become a threat to the sustainable management of our forests. It is important that we have symposia like these where we can refresh and update our existing core of professionals. It is important that we should also recruit people into the forestry profession. This is a challenge for which we should engage with our Education colleagues, because the development of the required skills base starts at school, where the basic foundations of mathematics, geography and natural sciences are laid. We should of course also ask ourselves if we contribute adequately to the education of our nation. We should at least ensure that the people of our country have a basic understanding of forestry, because all our people in South Africa depend on forest goods and services in some form every day. One just isn't sure whether they quite realise that.

It is evident that we have a few challenges ahead of us. As an audience concerned with the natural forest resources, you realise that the conservation of these present real challenges in the face of demand for resources. In some cases developers fix their targets on the land occupied by forests with the hope of financial gain through replacement of the forests with other forms of land use. In other cases people depend on the actual forest resources for sustaining their livelihoods. In our policies and approaches to regulation we should be balanced. This is in fact a principle of our policy and Forestry legislation. It calls for good judgment on the part of those that have to enforce the law, and it requires that we educate people about the value and importance of our forests.

A challenge that we should not overlook is that of Climate Change. It is something you will be discussing during the symposium and surely we will be talking about it during similar future events

I hope the symposium will empower you and inspire you to ensure that we retain our forests for future generations while optimising the benefits that local communities derive from them in the present. I thank all of you that contributed to the event, including the organising committee, Merle Falken and her team that arranged the logistics, those that contributed resources in the form of funding for participants and gifts. Our colleagues from the Working for Water programme contributed some gifts for al of you, while some of our international delegates were funded by donors, including FAO. A special word of thanks and best wishes also goes to each of you who will be presenting.

With that, ladies and gentlemen, I thank you and declare the proceedings of the symposium open. I wish you a successful conference.