

Inaugural Lecture
28 April 2010
Professor Tony Booth

Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Deans, Heads of Department, colleagues, students, members of the Booth family, ladies and gentlemen.

Welcome to this Inaugural Lecture, which at Rhodes is associated with the University conferring the status of full professor on an academic.

It is also a public celebration of the intellectual and scholarly achievements of an academic by peers, students, family and friends and the wider public.

This evening's inaugural lecture by Professor Tony Booth of the Department of Ichthyology and Fisheries Science, entitled "So long, and thanks for all the fish", will be no exception.

Anthony John Booth was born in Zimbabwe in 1970 just three months before his family relocated to South Africa. Moving to the "Big Smoke", Tony

spent his childhood in Johannesburg until he was 13. He then asked his parents if he could go to boarding school. Travelling by train, Tony and his mother took a long trip through Bloemfontein to visit the well-known Border schools, finally settling on Queen's College in Queenstown.

Having always been a fan of the hook and fishing line, Tony's formative years were (mis)spent fishing at Zoo Lake and Emmarentia Dam in Johannesburg, and Bongolo Dam outside of Queenstown. But, taking up the game of hockey at Queen's College, from the age of 14 he began to perfect the balance of playing hockey in the winter and resuming his beloved fishing in the summer months.

Having long nurtured a dream of becoming a vet, as he entered his senior high school years he realised he did not have the grades to enter for a veterinary degree. Scoping further afield for a career that would allow him to work with animals, he hit on the idea of being a game ranger. This fad was quickly laid to rest by a family friend who

categorically told Tony he would never be able to provide for a family in such a career.

Then one day, nose deep in the latest edition of *Tight Lines*, he was taken in by an article about tiger fishing in the Okavango Delta. Fascinated at the idea of being able to incorporate his passion for fishing into a career in ichthyology, Tony approached his school career counselor to find out what, exactly, an "ichthyologist" was. The article he had been reading was about the work of Dr Glenn Merron, an ex-JLB Smith Institute researcher who was at the time conducting his PhD research in the swamps.

Serendipitously, the school counselor had studied at Rhodes, knew about Margaret and JLB Smith and soon organized the wife of the school's Deputy Headmaster to take Tony through to Rhodes for interviews with Tom Hecht and Pat Hulley.

After failing mathematics with a G, Tony repeated the subject on standard grade and then spent a year coaching sport and working at a day-care

centre. And the rest, as they say, is now history and Tony has never looked back. He enrolled at Rhodes in 1990 and completed a Bachelor of Science majoring in Zoology and Computer Science in 1992. Returning to his intended path, an Honours year in Ichthyology and Fisheries Science during 1993 sealed the deal and led to the completion of his PhD in 1997 and an academic career in Fisheries Science.

Since his initial introduction to ichthyology through the pages of *Tight Lines*, Tony has published two papers with Glenn Merron and seven papers with Tom Hecht, whose office he has since commandeered.

In 1998 he became a lecturer in the Department of Ichthyology and Fisheries Science (DIFS) and was awarded the International Foundation for Science (IFS) Scholarship for noteworthy peer-reviewed research in the sub-Saharan region. In 2000 he became the first South African to receive an IFS/DANIDA Award research grant, and in 2001 was promoted to senior lecturer.

During 2002 he earned the distinction of being a Fulbright Visiting Scholar, and between 2003 and 2004 he was the Meek Professor at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks USA before being promoted to the position of Associate Professor at Rhodes in 2004. During 2003 he also held the Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Research Award. Since 2009 Tony has filled the position of full Professor at DIFS.

Tony's research interests lie in quantitative fisheries biology and ecology, concentrating on fish biology and its assessment and management in southern Africa. His current research focuses on quantitative ecology and the life history patterns of marine, estuarine and freshwater fishes. He is the grant holder for two National Research Foundation grants for the period 2008 to 2010. These respectively provide R1.4 million for research into the *Integrated biodiversity and process study of African coelacanths and their ecosystems* and R400 000 for research into *Freshwater fish trophodynamics*.

He has (co-)supervised 10 Masters and four Doctoral theses and is currently supervising three PhD and three MSc students. Two of his graduated Masters students were awarded the South African Association for the Advancement of Science (S₂A₃) Bronze Medal awarded annually to the best MSc thesis from each of the six premiere South African Universities.

He has also examined MSc and PhD theses from the University of Cape Town, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, University of Tasmania, Deakin University, and the Carl von Ossietzky Universität, Oldenburg.

In the professional arena he is a member of the Zoological Society of Southern Africa, the SANCOR Linefish Research Group, and the Biotelemetry Research Group. He has also been the technical advisor to the Fishery/Aquatic GIS Research Group and an academic representative on the Marine Scientist Development Board, the governing body of the Marine Scientist Development Programme, a

Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism initiative to facilitate the further academic development of government-employed fisheries scientists with expertise in Marine and Coastal Management.

In addition he is a member for the South African National Committee for the Scientific Committee for Oceanic Research and has been approached to appraise research proposals for the National Science Foundation (USA), NRF (RSA), Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Awarded a NRF scientific rating of C2, Tony has authored or co-authored 75 peer-reviewed scientific articles, a book review and presented 24 conference papers.

He is also on the editorial board of the *Open Fish Journal* and has peer-reviewed manuscripts for many reputed journals, including: *African Journal of Aquatic Science*, *African Journal of Marine*

Science, African Journal of Tropical Hydrobiology and Fisheries, African Journal of Zoology, Belgium Journal of Zoology, Canadian Journal of Fisheries and Aquatic Sciences, Copeia, Environmental Biology of Fishes, Fisheries Ecology and Management, Fisheries Research, Hydrobiologia, ICES Journal of Marine Science, Journal of Applied Ichthyology, Journal of Fish Biology, Koedoe, Marine and Freshwater Science, Marine Biology Research (formerly Sarsia and Ophelia) and US Fishery Bulletin.

In 1999 he was invited to be on the organising committee and co-edit the peer-reviewed proceedings of the 17th Lowell Wakefield Fisheries Symposium on *Spatial Processes and Management of Fish Populations* in Anchorage, Alaska. He was also the keynote speaker at the *Second International Symposium on Spatial Analysis/GIS in the Aquatic Sciences* held in 2002 at the University of Sussex, UK.

It is my pleasure to introduce Professor Tony Booth.