

***Obituary: Prof. François Doumenge (October 9, 1926 - July 16, 2008)***

Professor François Doumenge died peacefully in his sleep, from heart failure, on 14 July 2008. He was 81.

François Doumenge was intimately involved in the life of CIESM for many years. He counted many, many friends in our Commission, who found irresistible his vast appetite for life which accompanied a rare erudition (e.g., on the islands of the world, on Middle Age fisheries, on African wildlife, on 'tuna civilization', on the culture of pearl, etc, etc...). Wonderful stories which he shared generously with anyone who cared to listen.

François, among many other distinguished positions, was elected Secretary General of CIESM in 1988, a position that he held jointly, after the retirement of Cdt Jean-Yves Cousteau, with the Direction of the Oceanographic Museum in Monaco. François was determined to change the Commission into a modern, powerful tool for marine research and it was him who convinced me to leave absorbing responsibilities at UNESCO to come here as Director General and undertake this rather complex mission. Without his constant encouragement and support, I would not have had the possibility to carry this through.

Many of us will have distinct, rich memories of this fascinating, multi-faceted man. Some will remember his 'larger than life' tales, others his unbounded intellectual curiosity. François had the capacity to plunge with voracity into new theories and then come up with remarkable, original syntheses on subjects which were practically new for him (El Nino, sapropels, Messinian crisis, ...). We will always remember his contagious enthusiasm (even in his later years, despite mounting health problems) and his immense talents to make us laugh, to make us happy.

I was fortunate enough to be a close friend of François (and of his wonderful wife Kyoko) for more than 20 years. Together we traveled on missions far across the world, to Korea, Costa Rica, California, Australia ... and nearby to many friendly places around the Mediterranean Sea. Great memories, and a vast reservoir for stories. But still one of my favorite souvenirs is that of our first encounter. It was in Paris, on a cold winter day of 1986. He had invited me for a 'working lunch' at 'his' restaurant in the heart of the Zoo... of which he was the Director. I did not know what to expect but I learned fast: two rows of *maîtres d'hôtel*, arranged by size, greeted us at the door, and then brought a multitude of enormous 'house specialties' for us to devour in what seemed an endless cortege. I distinctly remember having to

lean over the side to continue our conversation as my view of him was blocked by a mountain of salads, hams and saucissons, plus wine bottles of all sorts. I liked him immediately. I cannot forget either that our 'serious' talk only began two hours later ... around cheese time: François tended to weigh newcomers in part on their capacity to deal with wine and food ... As he used to say : 'I have some difficulty to trust people who are too thin'.

François Doumenge did accomplish many things through the course of a long career, as shown by his huge publication record. As a Professor in Geography at the University of Montpellier in the 1950s, he specialized early on the relation between human populations, biology and fisheries, especially in island ecosystems. Until 1960 his research focused on the Bay of Biscay, the Gulf of Guinea and the western Mediterranean Sea. Thereafter his research moved to coral reef ecosystems in Polynesia and Micronesia, and to the use of tunas in the tropical Pacific. Afterwards, he acted successively as Director of the Abidjan University Tropical Research Institutes (1967-1970), Project Manager of the south Pacific Islands Fisheries Development Agency (1971-1973), Professor in Wildlife Conservation at the National Museum of Natural History in Paris (1979-1988), President of the French Overseas Research Institute / ORSTOM (1987-1988) and finally Director of the Oceanographic Museum in Monaco (1988-2001).

This is a sad day for the oceans and for many of us. François Doumenge was our friend. We will not forget his passion for life.

Frederic Briand  
Director General, CIESM