

# CLEAN UP ON World Oceans Day



THE United Nations proclaimed World Oceans Day on 8 June in 2008 and this year's theme is 'Our Oceans, Our Future' and focuses on encouraging solutions to plastic pollution and preventing marine litter for a healthier ocean and a better future.

The environment inland cannot be separated from the oceans, particularly in a coun-

try like South Africa, which has a coastline of more than 3 000 km. Pollution of rivers flowing into the sea affects species found in the oceans. These products range from plastics to sewage. It is therefore important that there is awareness raising of the conservation of the oceans during Environment Month celebrations.

A healthy world ocean is critical to our survival. Every year, World Oceans Day provides a unique opportunity to honour, help protect, and conserve the world's oceans. Oceans are very important because they:

- generate most of the oxygen we breathe
- help feed us
- regulate our climate

- clean the water we drink
- offer a pharmacopoeia of medicines
- provide limitless inspiration

Participate in a World Oceans Day event or activity this year and help protect the ocean for the future. It is up to each one of us to help ensure that our ocean is healthy for future generations.

## Working for the Coast encourages communities to clean up beaches

THE Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) launched another exciting new cycle of the Working for the Coast (WfC) programme last year, during the World Oceans Day celebrations in Durban.

The WfC programme is one of DEA's Expanded Public Works Projects (EPWP) implemented in order to clean and rehabilitate the coastline, whilst creating jobs and skills development in coastal communities.

The launch introduced a new Working for the Coast project cycle, which will run for two years, covering the entire South African coastline from Alexander Bay to Kosi Bay. These projects will generate approximately 2 407 work opportunities.

The Department also hosted an eventful beach clean-up campaign to celebrate World Oceans Day led by the Director-General of DEA Nosipho Ngcaba, DEA officials, community members, schools from surrounding areas, and beneficiaries of the Department's Working for Water and Working for the Coast Programmes.

During her keynote address, Ngcaba announced that the total



Deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs Barbara Thomson and the Director General of Environmental Affairs Nosipho Ngcaba join the community for a clean-up campaign.

PHOTO: TSHEGO LETSHWITI

mass of waste collected on the day was 729.5 kilograms and that the most common litter found was plastic bottle caps, metal bottle caps, polystyrene pieces and cigarette butts.

She encouraged community members to keep their beaches clean in order to combat the challenge of marine litter that is currently facing the country.

"South Africa is not immune to the problem as the presence of litter, particularly plastic items is a common sight along our recrea-

tional beaches and estuaries – especially in urban areas.

"The Ellen MacArthur Foundation has said that by 2050 there will be more plastic than fish in the world's oceans.

"Therefore celebrations such as World Oceans Day should be used to raise more awareness about the problem of plastic litter and to encourage the public to make a practical contribution by participating in clean-up campaigns," she concluded.

## Facing the Antarctic oceans



Edna Molewa, Minister of Environmental Affairs, reviewing the SA Agulhas II, the Department of Environmental Affairs' research and supply vessel.

PHOTO: TSHEGO LETSHWITI

THE South African polar research and supply vessel, SA Agulhas II was officially launched and named on 21 July 2011 in Rauma, Finland.

It took over from the old SA Agulhas, as South Africa's new Antarctic research and supply vessel to provide logistical support to the South African National Antarctic Expedition (SANAE) on the Antarctic mainland and the bases on Marion and Gough Islands.

This major investment signals the Department of Environmental Affairs' commitment and intent in contributing to the understanding of the Earth as a

functioning, and integrated unit.

The polar vessel supports and undertakes research to underline the natural processes, measure human and pollution impact and document biodiversity.

The aim of such endeavours is to describe the present condition of the environment and contribute to forecasting of possible future environmental conditions.

This information is critical to optimise the planning, conservation and wise use of the ocean but is also required to detect the natural threats that may arise from the ocean or weather through climate change.

## REDUCING MARINE LITTER

MARINE LITTER is any synthetic solid material that goes into waterways (directly or indirectly) and ends up in the ocean including cigarette butts, plastic bags, polystyrene cups, glass, cans etc.

It enters the sea through stormwater drains and rivers, the illegal dumping of waste and fishing gear and beach users. Its effects are to entangle marine animals in fishing nets and choke them with plastic debris.

Often marine animals and birds die of starvation because they cannot digest plastic. Many of these waste items will float in our oceans for hundreds of years to come.

Debris along our coastlines is dangerous, as visitors might injure themselves on dumped metals and glass and it makes our coasts less attractive to visitors, leading to a decrease in tourism profit and recreational business.

Waste can also cause damage to vessels through collision and entanglement in propeller blades. In addition, plastic debris acts as a sponge for toxic chemicals, such as PCBs and DDT.



Marine litter clogs our seas killing its inhabitants.

We can help through proper waste management, by cutting down on the amount of waste we produce at home and at work and recycling as much of our waste as we can. Join in your local efforts to pick up waste, use bins and secure the bin lids to prevent litter blowing away.

Don't discard your fishing gear while out fishing. Opt for reusable items instead of single-use products and don't buy cosmetic products with plastic microbeads, as they could bio-accumulate in the food chain.

## Saving the African penguin

By Millicent Makoala

IN 2010, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) re-assessed the conservation status of the African penguin, which resulted in the up listing from 'vulnerable' to 'endangered'.

Because of this, CapeNature and the Department of Environmental Affairs hosted a meeting of a group of experts from various organisations and management authorities at Arniston in the Western Cape to develop the first national Biodiversity Management Plan (BMP) for the African penguin.

This BMP aimed to unify existing efforts by various authorities to halt the decline of this species.

African penguins breed in South Africa and Namibia and are endemic to southern Africa.

The South African breeding colonies are spread from Malgas Island on the west coast to Bird Island near Port Elizabeth in the east, while their non-breeding range extends from Namibia to KwaZulu-Natal.

Some vagrant birds have been recorded along the West African coast near Gabon and in the east



The African penguin, now endangered.

towards the Limpopo River mouth.

The African penguin population at present numbers about 19 000 breeding pairs, (down from a million in the 1920s), of which 80% are in South Africa.

Various modern day challenges affect African penguin populations: pollution (including oil spills); habitat degradation; food shortage; cli-

mate change; human disturbance; diseases; high levels of predation of eggs, chicks and/or adults mainly by gulls and seals.

Other predators, particularly at land-based colonies such as Stony Point and Boulders Beach, include mongoose, feral and domestic cats, caracal, domestic dogs and rodents.