

DEA takes plastic pollution awareness to Durban

By Gaopalelwe Moroane and Tshego Letshwiti

Image by Floyd Chauke



Above: The Department of Environmental Affairs' flagship vessel, the SA Agulhas II.

As part of this year's World Oceans Day celebrations, the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) held exhibitions at the Durban Harbour and aboard the DEAs research vessel, the SA Agulhas II from 08- 09 June 2018.

The event this year was observed under the theme: Preventing plastic pollution and encouraging solutions for a healthy ocean. Research conducted in 2015 found that between 90 000 and 250 000 tonnes of litter enters South Africa's oceans every year, the Department of Environmental Affairs is using the occasion of World Oceans Day to draw attention to the issue of marine pollution.

"It is important to remember that we need to tackle the problem of marine litter at source," says Dr

Molewa; adding: "Plastic products end up polluting our environment and oceans, endangering marine life and threatening human health. As consumers, we need to take steps at home, in the workplace, and in our everyday lives to limit the amount of plastic we use and how we dispose of it."

Oceans make up 80% of the earth's surface, and are the planet's life support system. With an estimated 300 million tonnes of plastics entering the world's oceans every year, there is an urgent need to tackle and eradicate the problem. Litter harms marine life in a number of ways. Physical harm is caused when animals become entangled in plastic or discarded fishing lines, or the rubbish could be mistaken for food and eaten leading to death.

Members of the public who participated in the World Oceans Day celebrations were given the opportunity to sign a pledge which to do their bit to stop Plastic pollution in order to keep the oceans healthy for current and future generations.

Also as part of the celebrations, the DEA took school learners from Durban and students from KZN Maritime schools on exhibition tours to teach them about the many opportunities and wonders of the oceans. These exhibitions by our partners were made up of displays by amongst others, Wild Oceans South Africa, AMSOL, eThekweni Municipality, SKA and the Kwa-Zulu Natal Sharks Board.

Over 2000 people were hosted aboard the vessel on 08-09 June 2018 and were given the opportunity to explore the ship and the

About the contributors: Gaopalelwe Moroane and Tshego Letshwiti

Gaopalelwe is an Assistant Director: Internal and External Communications in the Chief Directorate: Communications of the Department of Environmental Affairs. She joined the department in 2012 as an intern after completing her studies at Rhodes University

Ms Tshego Letshwiti is an Assistant Director within the Internal and External Communications Sub-Directorate at the Department of Environmental Affairs, in Cape Town. She joined the Department in February 2014 after working in print and broadcast Media. She holds a BA Honours Degree in Journalism from the University of Johannesburg.



Above: Over 2000 people were hosted aboard the vessel on 08-09 June 2018 and were given the opportunity to explore the ship and the Department's work in the oceans and coastal environment.



Above: Members of the public sign their pledge to do their bit to stop plastic pollution.

Department's work in the oceans and coastal environment.

The SA Agulhas II is a state of the art South African owned polar research and supply vessel which was a first of its kind acquired by the Department in 2012.

Visitors from different communities in and around Durban enjoyed guided tours of the vessel, from its state of the art laboratories to the lounge area which is dedicated to the very popular bridge where navigation of the vessel takes place.

Also as part of the tour, members of the public were guided through the scientific labs on board. Guided by our dedicated scientists and technicians, members of the public saw how the different tools and instruments on boarded operate. Some of the tools on display include the Ski-monkey which is a deep sea camera system which allows to get video/pictures footage of the sea floor and the Conductivity Temperature Depth (CTD) which is used to measure salinity, temperature oxygen, and depth of the water column.

Quick facts about the SA Agulhas II

- She was built in 2012 and II was designed to be an ice-breaking scientific research vessel and to supply South African research stations in the Antarctic and to Marion and Gough Islands.
- She was built by STX Finland in Rauma, Finland, to replace the aging SA Agulhas, which was retired from South African National Antarctic Programme (SANAP) duty.
- The SA Agulhas II is dedicated to the late songstress Miriam Makeba and has a lounge aboard the vessel named after her.
- The vessel has a length of 134 metres and weighs over 12,000 tons. It can accommodate 100 passengers.
- Every year, she travels to Marion, Gough Islands and Antarctica with a host of researchers from DEA and various institutions to do research on sea surface temperature, oxygen and carbon measurements which are key in enhancing our understanding of global climate change.



Above: DEA's Science Manager Mithuzuzeli Gulekana, demonstrates how the Conductivity Temperature Depth (CTD) functions. It is used to measure salinity, temperature oxygen, and depth of the water column.



Above: The Ski-monkey is a deep sea camera system which allows one to get videos/pictures footage of the sea floor. Laurene Snyders a Scientific technician from DEA elaborates on its functions.



Above: One of the areas visitors get to see during the SA Agulhas II Open is the Bridge, where navigation of the vessel takes place.