

We Don't Need Our Oceans. Huh?

By
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an ocean without the annual Greatest Shoal on Earth....

A local non-profit organisation, Wildoceans, a programme of the WildTrust, is causing a stir on social media. It recently launched its WE DON'T NEED OUR OCEANS campaign.

The environmental conservation organisation hopes to show South Africa (and the world) what life would be like without our oceans.

Then place a spotlight on just how much we depend on them, as well as mobilise a regional movement for increased marine protection.

WE DON'T NEED OUR OCEANS is a branch of the Ocean iMPAct campaign. The campaign underwrites a three-year project driving advanced protection of South Africa's oceans within Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Currently South Africa only protect 5% of the oceans space within MPAs.

Education is key

WildTrust, along with many other environmental organisations, has been pushing the need to conserve the planet for many years.

Campaign lead, Lauren van Nijkerk, says: "People don't act like they need the oceans. Covid-19 certainly made people question their relationship with nature. I do not believe it made people care less about themselves and more about the planet.

"So how do we tell our beautifully diverse South African people about our oceans and the need to protect them? I think we can do this by showing South Africa a world without our oceans. We take our oceans for granted.

"They are overfished, full of our trash, exploited, packed full of noisy vessels, explored with seismic blasts, drilled and reefs destroyed."

"They warn that at most, we have 10 years to stay below the 1.5°C heating threshold and avoid the existential risks to nature and people that crossing it will bring.

"The truth is – the need to protect this life-giving natural resource, is urgent," says van Nijkerk.

"Coral reef die-offs, collapsing fish populations and species extinctions are evidence of the escalating ocean crisis.

“Overfishing, ocean heating, acidification, pollution and multiple other stressors are eroding the ocean’s ability to function as our life support system.”

Act now

Nijkerk says the situation is far from hopeless. Although the time to act for our oceans is now and even a simple action, like refusing single-use plastics, makes a difference.

A shift from 5% to 10% protection in South Africa’s waters will also see massive benefits for the country.

This is apparent in the 2014 ‘State of the Ocean and Coasts Report’ which estimates the direct value of the marine ecotourism sector to the South African economy is around R400 million and its indirect value at more than R2 billion.

Human right

There is recognition that protecting the oceans and the complex web of life that lies below the surface is a fundamental human right. Research shows that every second breath we take comes from the ocean, says Nijkerk.

“MPAs are a critical tool in the ocean protection toolbox, playing an important role in ensuring the survival of all ocean space. Defending the oceans capacity to produce oxygen, sequester carbon and provide food and livelihoods for billions of people is vital. It is important to note that economic recovery is compatible with environmental protection.”

Reducing the pressure

“It is human nature to resist the pressure on us to do or believe anything. We want to be autonomous and make our own choices. When that pressure is reduced, any internal resistance is dissolved, and the person is left with the opportunity to make their own choice.

We hope that in the case of the WE DON’T NEED OUR OCEANS messaging, the response is likely to be – of course we do,” concludes van Nijkerk.

