

WORLD OCEANS DAY

Together we have the power to protect the ocean

Observed under the theme: "Together we have the Power to Protect the Ocean," this year's World Oceans Day (WOD) is intended to recognise the impact of climate change on our oceans and our people. It also seeks to draw attention to the fact that the impact can only be addressed if we stand together.

Oceans are not only a major driving force behind climate patterns and the predicted changes, but they are also responsible for feeding our planet: more than half the world population derives a significant portion of their protein from marine sources. Climate change adds more complexity to the challenge of understanding the oceans and its role in how the planet works. We must know how the oceans are functioning and changing and how these changes impact on weather and climate. Moreover, we need to recognise the vulnerability of our people in the country and on the continent. This is achieved by providing information and knowledge early enough so that it can be used in advance planning and forecasting. It will also direct the deployment of our limited resources in meeting climate change adaptation needs.

Despite the important role that oceans occupy in our lives and our economy, our oceans are under significant stress from pollution, over-fishing, climate change and habitat alteration. In terms of pollution alone, South Africans are known to discharge large volumes of sewage every day into the marine environment, much of which is untreated or partially treated, and thus posing a serious threat to marine habitats, species and the public. The volume of sewage dumped into our ocean is increasing significantly with population growth in coastal areas.

Over the past few decades, scientists around the world have observed the appearance of so-called 'dead zones' in the ocean where the levels of oxygen are so low that marine life cannot be supported. These dead zones are often caused by excessive nutrients in sewage and agricultural run-off and results in a loss of productivity because it then means that those areas can no longer be used. We do not want these areas to appear in South Africa and therefore we must find better ways of managing our waste.

As a country with such large ocean spaces next to us we are beginning to appreciate the real value of this national asset and how it can contribute to our livelihoods and economy. Technology is really unlocking the resources that lie within our ocean. The sustainable use of these resources will have a meaningful contribution to our ability to create jobs in years to come. Much of our ocean remains unexplored and therefore we need to urgently gather information and describe what resources we have and how they can be used sustainably. The Department of Environmental Affairs looks forward to working with other Departments and government agencies to effectively explore, use and manage our oceans.

Our future-Make it work

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