

Knysna Hope Spot

During May the inaugural meeting took place chaired by Eden Municipality and Tony Ribbink of the Sustainable Sea Trust with representatives from Knysna Municipality, SANParks, Cape Nature, environmental organisations, the media and some business owners. It was to start the planning and launch of Knysna Hope Spot on the 7th Dec.

A Hope Spot is defined as a special place that is critical to the health of the ocean. One needs to raise awareness by communicating with the public and sharing the knowledge, striving to empower people to take action towards leading a more sustainable lifestyle. A number of Hope Spots around the world have already been formally defined and protected, Knysna is one of only five international Hope Spots in South Africa.

A statement from Mission Blue is that about 12% of the land around the world is protected and less than 3% of the oceans have been protected. Mission Blue has committed itself to change this with more protection on the oceans.

Knysna area will stretch from Noetzie to Sedgefield-Wilderness. Of the 297 estuaries in the country Knysna is ranked as one of the most important in terms of biodiversity significance. There are several clear benefits to having the Knysna area declared as a Hope Spot. Not only will the area obtain international recognition and support as a valuable marine area critical to the health of the ocean, but it will also be promoted internationally as an area to visit for its beauty and uniqueness. This will significantly benefit tourism, business, and sustainable development. The area's Floristic Kingdom will be proclaimed a national heritage site this year and Knysna has the largest continuous indigenous forest with over 14000 hectares. The condition of the estuary and especially the seahorse population, our two blue flags beaches and the blue flag marina at Thesen Islands are some of the reasons to merit the area as a Hope Spot.

On Dec 7th Dr Sylvia Earle who is the architect of the Hope Spot will visit Knysna area. She has worked with National Geographic, is a TED award winner recipient, has 24 honorary degrees. A marine conservationist, author and arguably the world's most famous diver will be leading the Mission Blue Expedition, speaking to the public at special events, diving in the beautiful waters of South Africa and engaging with the people of South Africa to prompt the idea and to get support from the public and especially to the school children. The message is to save and restore the oceans which are the "blue heart of the earth" for future generations.

The expedition will also launch the book, South African Coasts - A celebration of our seas and shores, for which the public submitted photographs to celebrate 20 Years of South Africa's democracy. Hope is the central theme of this book.

Networks of Hope Spots maintain biodiversity, provide a carbon sink, generate life-giving oxygen, preserve critical habitat and allow low-impact activities like ecotourism to thrive. They are good for the ocean, which means they are good for us. By engaging governments, businesses, schools, research organizations, universities, civil society and the media will make everyone aware.

The establishment of this Hope Spot and that of Plettenberg Bay will, I hope, support the proposed linkage of a Marine Protected Area from Tsitsikamma to Robberg (which Plett is keen to do) and either continue to Noetzie or to the Goukamma Nature Reserve with a more inclusive approach where science, tourism, education and sustainable development and utilisation are possible, this

will to some extent allow us as Knysna-Noetzie residents to drive how we want our coast managed, without seeing it pillaged from outside influences.

Furthermore, on-going research and monitoring of our natural assets/resources are strongly encouraged by the initiative, and will be beneficial in promoting the area while ensuring sound management and informed decision making within the area. Together with this, Hope Spots are obligated to have set geographical boundaries that will further guide future planning, development and management.

The structure of a Hope Spot is such that public participation and support plays an integral part in all activities and decisions made which will greatly enhance the success of the initiative.