

Sustainable Seas Trust



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The [Plett Hope Spot](#) committee hosted a vibrant public meeting last Monday (26 May 2014) at the Denron Community Development Centre. [Prof Tony Ribbink](#) of the [Sustainable Seas Trust](#) (SST), the organisation facilitating the launch of South African Hope Spots announced that the Plett Hope Spot would be officially launched by SST patron, renowned marine scientist, founder of the organisation [Mission Blue](#) and architect of the Hope Spots, [Dr Sylvia Earle](#), initiative on the 8th of December 2014.

“People ask: Why should I care about the ocean? Because the ocean is the cornerstone of earth’s life support system, it shapes climate and weather. It holds most of life on earth. 97% of earth’s water is there. It’s the **blue heart of the planet** — we should take care of our heart. It’s what makes life possible for us. We still have a really good chance to make things better than they are. They won’t get better unless we take the action and inspire others to do the same thing. No one is without power. Everybody has the capacity to do something.”

— Sylvia A. Earle

[Hope Spots](#) are special marine conservation areas, which ignite public support and develop sustainable education and conservation programmes. It requires a collective effort from government, academia, business, civil society, clubs, schools, societies, sports groups and families. Dr Ribbink said “The future is in our hands and it is up to us to harness the power of people in this sweet spot of time to take care of the blue heart of the planet.”

The benefits of establishing a Hope Spot in Plett are multi-fold as it will: support existing government efforts to conserve the natural heritage; promote economic growth and business development; highlight existing and encourage new academic research opportunities; promote citizen science; offer robust educational and awareness programmes and help develop pride in all about the wonders of Plett.

Dr Gwenith Penry offered a presentation based on her ongoing post-doctoral research on South Africa’s Secretive Giants - the [South African Bryde’s whale](#), *Balaenoptera edeni*. Plett is fortunate to be home to the genetically isolated and small population (few hundred) of SA’s largest resident predator.

Mike Bridgeford of [BirdLife Plettenberg Bay](#) pointed out that Plettenberg Bay hosts 50% of the Endemic Birds found in SA and is also home to one of the largest sea-breeding colonies. Avitourism is currently the fastest growing form of nature-based tourism world-wide and the organization’s aim for the year is to encourage Launch and Avitourism Route and establish an

Trustees: Robert Lowe (Chairman), Frederick Krohnert (representing Nedbank Trust), Richard Laing, Baldwin Ngubane, Frederick Oosthuizen, Anthony Ribbink, Michael Rodel, Louis van Vuren

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Important Birding Area (IBA) combined with Tsitsikama. The organization also offers citizen science projects and partners in education programs in the area - key factors in the Hope Spot criteria.

The [Orca Foundation](#) listed a number of reasons why they are in favour of Plett becoming an international Hope Spot:

- Biodiversity hotspot means sustained fish populations which means increased numbers of whales, sharks, dolphins, seals, penguins, gannets, etc.
- Extension of existing MPAs
- More research opportunities, more conservation efforts
- Expose the world to Environmental Education (Eco-Tourism)
- Receiving international funding for NGOs
- Promoting and providing a holistic approach to sustainable economic development through conservation and tourism.

Without educated people, conservation is nothing as such [ORCA's](#) three principles which go hand in hand are: Research-Education-Conservation.

In closing Dr Mark Brown, [Natures Valley Trust](#) (NVT) Program Director and chairperson of the Hope Spot revealed the new logos featuring the Plett Hope Spot's – Iconic Species Humpback Dolphins *Sousa chinensis/plumbea*. Currently there are fewer than 1000 left in SA and there is considerable concern over the future of this species. Plett is one of the places that humpback dolphins frequent and can be seen regularly from shore and boat.

Plett Hope spot will be hosting an Art Auction and World Oceans Day Events on the 7th and 8th of June respectively to raise awareness and funds for the Plett Hope Spot. For more information about any of these events or if you are interested in participating in the Plett Hope Spot initiative contact pletthopespot@gmail.com or visit the [Plett Hope Spot Facebook page](#).

For more information or for access to hi res photographs please contact maya@sst.org.za



