

Listeners in Algoa country rally to protect Algoa Bay

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Residents of Nelson Mandela Bay are fighting for the future of the beautiful and bio-diverse bay on which Port Elizabeth is situated in both word and deed.

Algoa FM has been keeping listeners informed of two of the latest threats to the sustainability of the biodiversity and tourism potential of Algoa Bay – fish farming and oil spills during offshore bunkering operations.

The station broke the news of an oil spill shortly after it happened on Saturday, 6 June – alerting residents to keep a watch for oiled sea birds.

Over the next few days around 100 endangered African penguins, gannets and cormorants were taken to the South African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB), which issued a call for help, asking residents to donate newspapers, black bags and other supplies.

Residents responded to the call, which was supported on air by Algoa FM.

The impact was brought home to listeners when a very tired-sounding Stacey Webb, regional manager of SANCCOB was interviewed on the Daron Mann breakfast show (DMB).

She said spills like the 350 litres of fuel oil from the Liberian-registered MV Chrysanthi S were threatening the future of the endangered African penguin. The largest remaining breeding colony of the bird is Bird Island in Algoa Bay.

DMB Breakfast Show anchor Daron Mann said “I really am hoping that there are companies tuned in this morning who realise that there is a new way of doing business and this goes beyond measuring your sales figures and production schedules.

“It goes by also measuring what you are doing to make the planet that mankind is destroying a better place. That is part of the way in how you measure your success as a business, and this is a way you can contribute to something which has happened right here in our backyard”.

Mann has become known for his environmental activism since he took on the management of East London zoo publicly for the conditions under which bears and other animals are being kept.

Algoa FM put the SANCCOB contact details on its Facebook page.

The plight was also covered extensively and regularly in the the station’s news broadcasts.

Listeners have also been kept updated since 2011 about plans for fish farms that, detractors say, will threaten tourism in what is recognised as one of the best bays in the world for water sport.

The initial plans were scrapped in 2015, but the Department of Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries has since revived them in the form of an aquaculture zone.

Algoa FM carried news of a planned demonstration to protest against proposals to construct the giant fish farms in front of Port Elizabeth’s main tourist beaches.

Thousands turned out for the demonstration on a Saturday morning.

Earlier, Gary Koekemoer of Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) Algoa Bay branch gave listeners in a DMB interview a description and update of the plans for the fish farms, and reasons why WESSA was opposing them.

The organisation believes that the fish farms will destroy more jobs than the 1,200 the consultants to DAFF estimate that up to 80 fish cages could create.

Swimmers, surfers, paddlers and sailors will stay out of the water for fear of the sharks that the cages will attract – so destroying the local tourism industry, said Koekemoer.

Algoa FM made the interview available on podcast, and also provided links to the report and details on how listeners could object on its Facebook page.

There has been a victory for those opposing the fish farm in that DAFF has moved the proposed fish farm to a site near the Ngqura harbour, and has applied to the department of environmental affairs for permission to develop oyster and mussel farms off the main swimming beaches – Hobie and Kings beach.

The application is still subject to public participation, with meetings planned for the end of July and beginning of August.

“It is heartening to see how deeply the people of Nelson Mandela Bay and the region as a whole care about our marine environment,” says Algoa FM marketing manager Toinette Koumpen, who is also an Ironman athlete.

“We will continue to provide a voice for those who want to sustain and create jobs by protecting our natural assets,” she says.

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