

African Summit on Marine Debris executive summary report released

During World Environmental Week last month, the first conference to look into the issue of marine debris on the African continent and its oceans was held at the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) conference centre in Cape Town.



Hosted by Plastics SA as co-signatory of the Honolulu Commitment with other international plastic associations and supported by UNEP, the Department of Environmental Affairs, 120 delegates from various academic institutions, government departments, conservation and animal welfare organisations, media, plastics industry members and concerned citizens formed the summit.

Ten of the delegates were from African Countries, (Kenya, Nigeria, Seychelles, Cameroun, Ivory Coast, Mozambique and Namibia) and some delegates were from Europe and Australia.

The summit has served a platform for a formal network to be managed by UNEP for African countries on an issue that does not receive the same attention as in the developed countries. The ills associated with a growing population and increasing economic growth will lead to an increase in marine litter from Africa.

The goals of the summit were met in the following ways:

- Lessons were shared on strategies and best practices to reduce and prevent the impacts of marine debris and it also served as basis for the latest research projects, results, and methods. One outcome was adopting the monitoring method used by the CSIRO in Australia. This will mean that in due time countries in Africa will be able to report on marine debris using the same methodology.
- The summit also promoted international co-learning and identified possible areas for strengthening continental cooperation.
- An area that received a lot of attention and which will serve as the basis for future activities with other African countries was recycling initiatives in South Africa that can be rolled out in other African countries.

The most important outcome of the event is the establishment of a Network for African Countries on Marine Debris which will be administered by UNEP and technologically supported by Plastics SA and its partners.

Plans are already afoot to promote and workshop the network at the Second Global Conference on Land-Ocean Connectivity to be held in October 2013 in Jamaica as it meets all the objectives of this conference. In short, Africa will start, although in a small way, the long path of the fight against marine debris and stop making plastics the pariah of the packaging industry.