



Gwenith S Penry



Plett Hope Spot

To be the best Hope Spot in the world

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1. INTRODUCTION TO HOPE SPOTS

Bitou is set to become one of South Africa's first International Hope Spots and, with the help of the greater Plett Community, Bitou can aspire to be the best Hope Spot in the world.

Hope Spots are a global network of identified marine areas, promoted and driven by the global initiative, Mission Blue. Mission Blue, in turn, was established through the Sylvia Earle Alliance (SEA), an initiative aimed at exploring and caring for the oceans, started by Dr Sylvia Earle, a world famous diver, oceanographer and National Geographic Explorer in Residence.

Dr Earle defined Hope Spots in a manner that makes them rather like classical Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). However, in South Africa, and perhaps much of the rest of Africa too, it is necessary to have a greater human involvement to promote, sustain and add value to MPAs, and Hope Spots can and should do this in this context. The public participation approach is also consistent with Dr Earle's call to draw people into resolving the global environmental crises. The success of a Hope Spot depends on the people driving the initiative and the manner in which it is accepted and supported by civil society, local and national government, businesses, clubs, schools and universities. The Mission Blue Hope Spot initiative is an international movement, so the Hope Spots do need to meet international standards and qualify for international support.

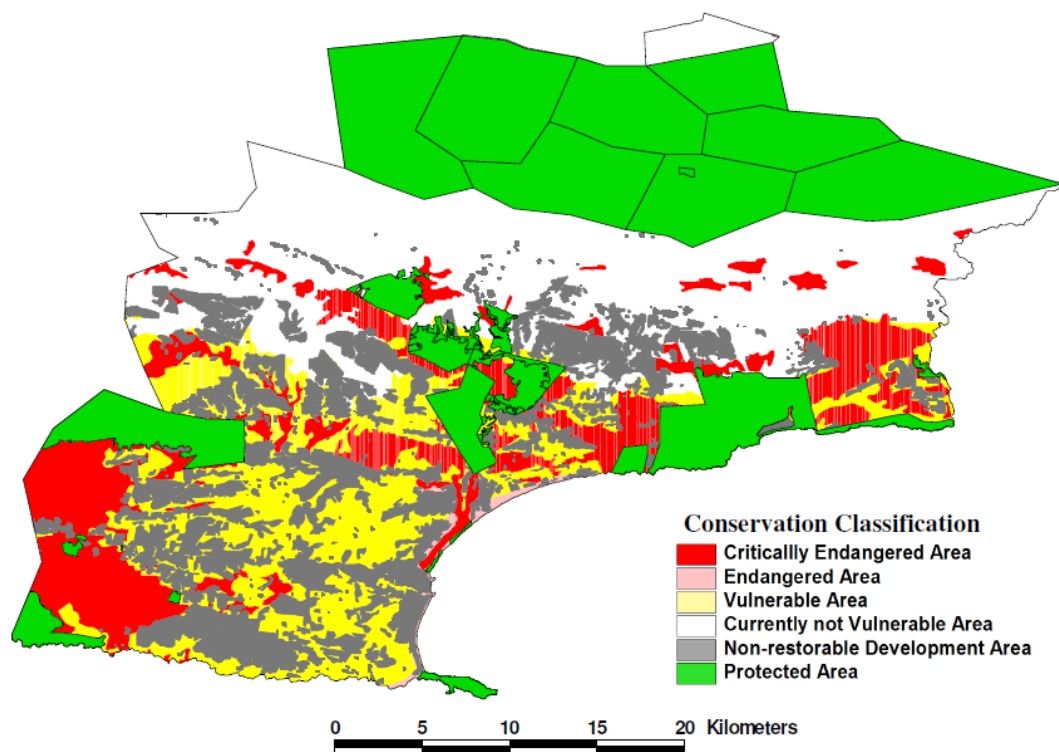
The Sustainable Seas Trust (SST), the South African partner of Mission Blue, together with several Non-Profit and Non-Government Organisations (NPO's and NGO's) in the Bitou region have started the process of establishing the greater Plettenberg Bay area as an international Hope Spot. A process has begun whereby several different organisations, non-government and government, as well as academic and educational institutions, clubs, businesses and civil society will be able to participate and become part of the greater initiative under one banner of Hope for the future of our marine environment – the Plett Hope Spot which will be officially launched by Dr Earle in December 2014.

2. SCIENTIFIC JUSTIFICATION

Plett can be the best Hope Spot in the world as it has everything going for it; everything a Hope Spot should be and should have is contained within the Plett environment and achieved by the established and planned projects of the different Government bodies, NGO's and community initiatives. However, most importantly, the Plett marine environment is worth protecting under the Hope Spot banner because of its unique and vitally important natural environment in terms of its geographical, geological, oceanographic, and biological features.

Geographically the Plettenberg Bay region is highly diverse. The coastline consists of a combination of long white beaches, rugged cliffs, pebble beaches and rocky shores.⁶ These diverse terrestrial features extend into the ocean, forming under water habitats just as diverse: subtidal sandy bottoms, subtidal rocky reefs, deep gullies, and rocky pools, all hosting a diverse range of organisms adapted to a specific niche.

The critically endangered dune systems along the beautiful long beaches of the Plett region play an important role in protecting the coastline. The dunes form buffers against wave action and storms and act as a reservoir for sand that can then later replenish beach areas. The dune vegetation, namely Hartenbos Primary Dune vegetation and Wilderness Forest Thicket, are classified as vulnerable¹³ and the Gouritz Dune Thicket and Robberg Dune Thicket are classified as endangered²¹, all of which play a vital role in terms of biodiversity conservation and bird movement and nesting along the coast.¹⁰

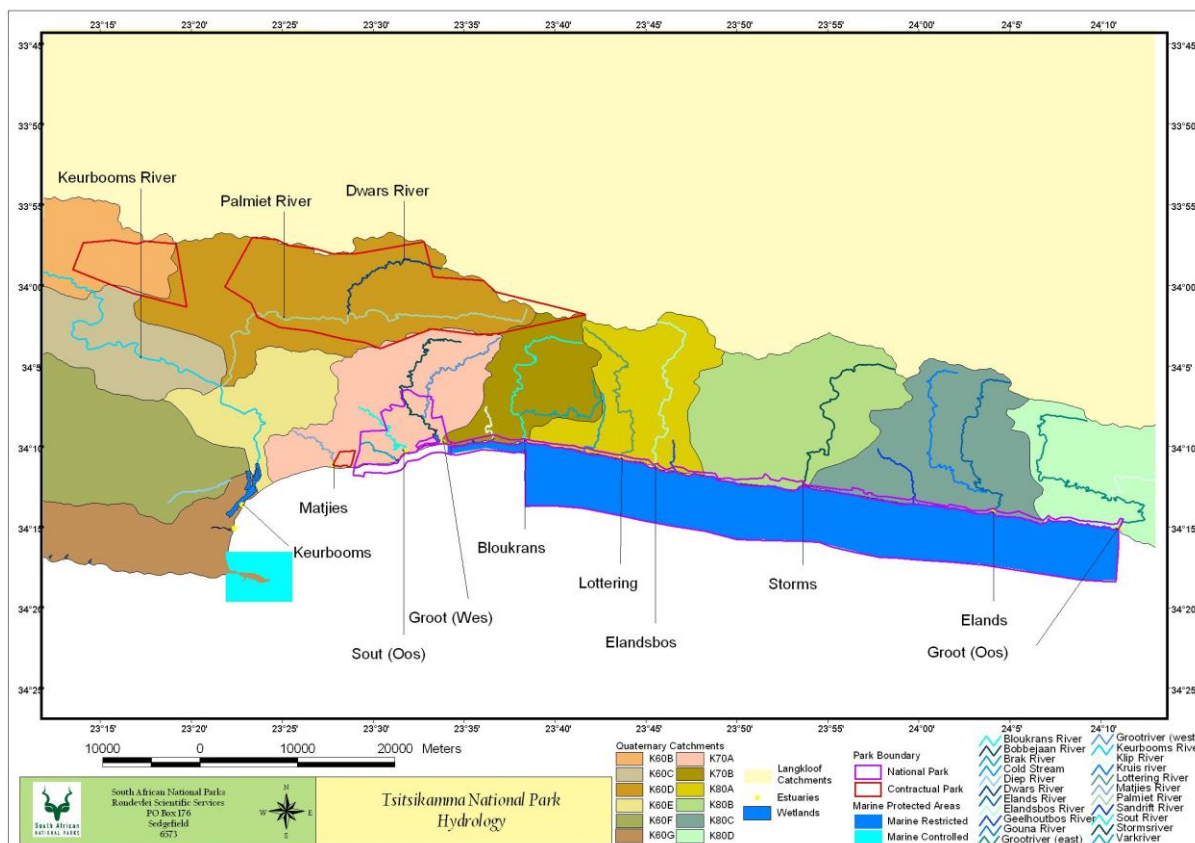


Map 1: The Conservation Classification of the different habitat types in the Plett region (cited from: A Rapid Conservation Assessment and Framework for a Conservation Plan for the Plettenberg Bay Municipality, Biodiversity Conservation Unit WESSA, BCU Report 2. 15 January 2004)

The Bay is biologically diverse, with high endemism boasting several rare, endangered, and threatened species that make use of the Bay, including the near threatened Humpback whale (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), data deficient Bryde's whale (*Balaenoptera brydei spp*), and the vulnerable Indo-pacific humpback dolphin (*Sousa chinensis*) and Indo-pacific bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops aduncus*). Southern right whales (*Eubalaena australis*) migrate to the South African coastline every year and use the protected waters of the Bay to mate and calve. The world famous 'sardine run' (annual northward migration of small pelagic fish) passes through the Bay every autumn, bringing with it thousands upon thousands of common dolphins (*Delphinus delphis/capensis*), different species of shark, whales, Cape gannets (*Morus capensis*), cormorants and Cape fur seals (*Arctocephalus pusillus*). All year round, the Bay is home to a colony of approximately five thousand Cape fur seals, and a healthy population of Great White Sharks (*Carcharodon carcharias*). Sea turtles listed as threatened under CITES (the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) occur occasionally in the Bay; these include Loggerhead, Hawksbill, Leatherback, and Green turtle. In the adjacent Tsitsikamma MPA, over 202 fish species from 84 families have been recorded²⁰. The abundant fish species such as Red Roman, Hake, Kob and Cape Salmon share their water with the more vulnerable fish including Red Steenbras and White Steenbras. The long-lived, slow growing Red Roman takes shelter here within the rocky reefs and is potentially vulnerable because it takes so long to reach sexual maturity and is regularly targeted by recreational and commercial fishermen. A community of endangered Pansy Shells reside along the Keurbooms Strand and Robberg utilising the sandy bottom. ⁹.

The seabird population in Plett is also something to take note of; along the Keurbooms Estuary, you will find one of the largest Kelp Gull colonies on mainland South Africa, which is also home to several other species of birds including the African Black Oystercatcher, a species of high conservation concern in South Africa. Along the Keurbooms Estuary, the Coordinated Water Avifaunal Counts (CWAC) Programme has recorded 64 species of waterbirds.⁹

There are six notable rivers flowing into the sea on this stretch of coastline from the west end of Tsitsikamma National Park all the way through to Kranshoek, namely the Groot River, Salt River, Maitjes River, Keurbooms River and Bitou River, and the Piesang River. Some of these rivers provide habitat for endangered fresh water fish like the Eastern Cape Redfin and the Slender Redfin. Each of these rivers also contribute towards the health of the fish and invertebrate population of the sea, by adding fresh water to the ocean system and creating river mouths and estuaries which serve as critical nursery grounds for certain fish species. There are four estuaries in the Plett region. The Piesang Valley Estuary, Keurbooms River Estuary, Groot River Estuary, and the Salt River Estuary. The Piesang River Estuary has recently undergone numerous studies showing it is ecologically important as a nursery ground for fish. The entire Keurbooms / Bitou Estuary is designated as a Critical biodiversity Area by the Garden Route Initiative (GRI)¹⁰. Furthermore, the Keurbooms Estuary is rated as the 18th most important estuary in South Africa, being one of the very few estuaries in South Africa that has not been drastically altered by water schemes, canalisation, and unsustainable developments. The Keurbooms also serves as a nursery ground for over 29 species of fish including the important and over-exploited line-fish species such as White Steenbras, Spotted Grunter and Leervis, as well as the endangered Knysna Seahorse listed on the IUCN Red List,⁹ and numerous invertebrates and mollusc species.



Map 2: The rivers, estuaries and wetlands in the Plett region (obtained from South African National Parks).

The Bitou Wetland, feeding into the Keurbooms Estuary, makes way to large flood plains, mudbanks, saltmarsh, and fresh water creeks. The Bitou Wetland is a valuable ecological resource under severe threat from development. The wetland provides a number of ecological benefits including flood attenuation from its ability to store water and release it slowly; it purifies water by removing pollutants and the wetland plants take up dissolved nutrients, preventing large algae blooms from suffocating the ecosystem. The wetland provides habitat for wetland birds such as the Red-chested Flufftail and Baillon's Crake, Moorhen, Dabchick, waterfowl, egrets, Shelduck, Yellow-billed Duck and Avocet, all of which make use of the area for roosting, breeding and feeding.⁴

Near the eastern boundary of the Plett Hope Spot is the Groot River Estuary, which has an intermediate botanical importance rating based on the aquatic and semi-aquatic vegetation.¹³ Initial fish surveys in the Groot River Estuary, conducted in 2010 by Kyle Smith and his team from SANParks, highlighted the estuary as an important nursery ground for a number of marine spawning species. The Groot River Estuary is regarded as a sanctuary for resident estuarine fish species, as well as marine migrant species such as the endemic Cape Stumpnose. The Groot River Estuary also plays a role in hosting endangered species such as the estuarine pipefish, the over-exploited and vulnerable White Steenbrass, Leervis and Spotted Grunter. The Nature's Valley Trust (NVT) is conducting a monitoring project over the next five years, under Kyle Smith's guidance, to determine both the structural and functional properties of the estuary's fish community.

Special note should be taken of the Salt River where 13 undescribed aquatic invertebrate species, as well as three possible new genera, have been discovered in a recent aquatic invertebrate survey. It was also discovered that the Salt River holds the richest known diversity of species in the mayfly family Teloganodidae in Africa.⁸

The Bay and its surrounds are of a high conservation value and as such, several Universities, NGO's, and Government institutions conduct numerous and varied research projects in the area throughout the year. The Nature's Valley Trust has developed a centralised research station that will assist in the facilitation of, and provide a central hub, where new and ongoing research can be conducted in collaboration with all stakeholders and universities for the good of the area as a whole.

In conclusion, the high biological diversity, and wide range of habitats makes the Bay a valuable asset in terms of research, conservation, education, and even economic value. The environmental value/importance/services provided by the Bay can never be replaced once it is gone and with it all the resources, employment/livelihood opportunities, recreational uses, and aesthetic and scenic value it provides. It is therefore highly beneficial for the Plett area to be a Hope Spot as it will provide the ideal platform for all interested parties to work together towards a common conservation and social goal.

2.1. Conservation imperative

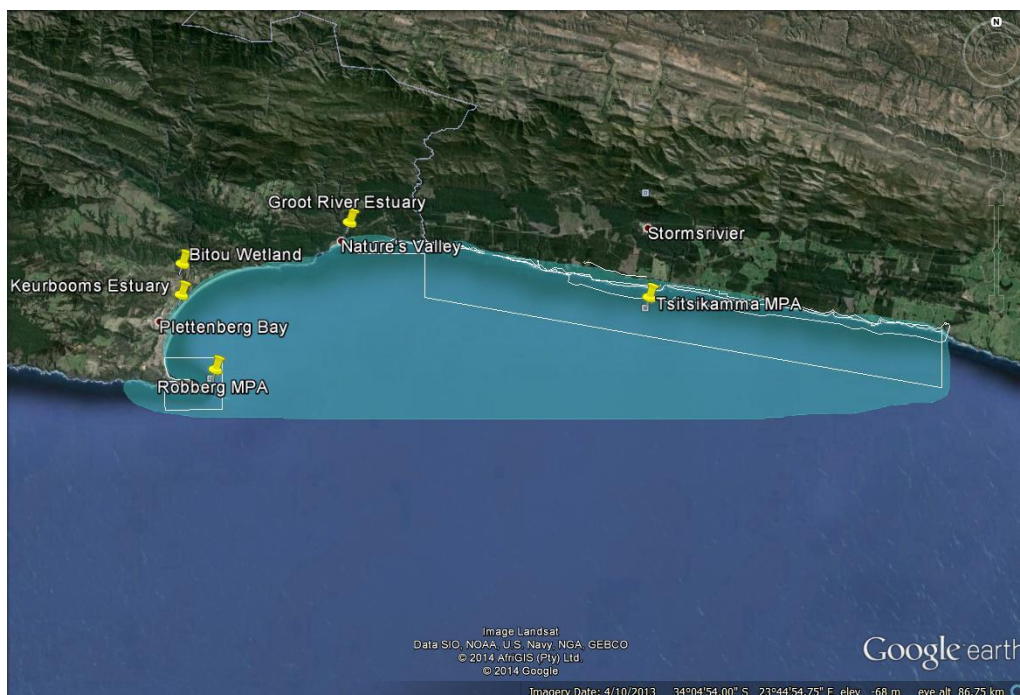
Over exploitation of marine resources in South Africa since the 1900's have severely depleted stocks of many species resulting in the alteration of community structures in terms of keystone species and top predators, the alteration of benthic environments, and the change in species physical traits in terms of size and growth rates. This is especially true of linefish, West Coast Rock Lobster, and abalone. Unsustainable coastal developments in unsuitable areas have resulted in the loss of important supporting habitats such as marine fish nursery and feeding grounds. Human disturbance in terms of industry and recreational activities have increased resulting in increased underwater noise pollution, habitat destruction and other forms of pollution such as industrial and agricultural runoff. More proactive management and protection is needed for the marine and coastal environment and MPA's are not always enough.⁶

Marine Protected Areas (MPA's) are an important tool in the management of fish populations^{7,18,11} as they allow fish stocks to recover and increase the fish in adjacent areas by providing it with fish larvae, juveniles and adults.^{2,16,17,19} Plett already has two MPA's; the Tsitsikamma MPA which includes a no-go zone, while the Robberg MPA allows recreational on-shore linefishing, at least for the time being. The Hope Spot concept is not strictly a MPA. Rather, the Hope Spot initiative provides a platform whereby active participation between the public, government, and NGO's, can come up with win-win solutions on how our Bay can be sustainably and proactively managed.

Even though Plett has so much going for it, it still needs protection. A comparative study of shore-based linefishery catch data between Plettenberg Bay and the adjacent Tsitsikamma MPA have shown that non-migratory species, such as Red Roman, Poenskop, John Brown, Santer and Bronze Bream are much lower in Plett than in the MPA despite the availability of suitable habitat. This could be as a result of unsustainable shore-based linefishing and a growing recreational/commercial boat based industry, showing that more management is needed.^{1,16} The point stands that we have high species diversity and endemism, but how long will this remain if we, the residents of Plettenberg Bay, don't make a concerted effort to actively become involved in the protection of marine life in the Bay. The Hope Spot can provide this platform, whereby anyone can make a contribution towards all aspects of marine conservation.

3. BOUNDARIES

The proposed Hope Spot area is approximately 871km² and demarcated as the marine area between and including the Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Area (MPA) and the Robberg MPA. The marine boundary of this bay area is delineated by the line between the South-Western seaward corner of Robberg MPA (34° 07.633' S; 23° 22.300' E) and the South-Eastern seaward corner of Tsitsikamma MPA and measures (34° 06.600' S; 24° 11.655' E). The terrestrial boundary is demarcated by the Mean High Water Mark (MHW) along the coastline and includes the Keurbooms River Estuary, Piesang River Estuary and Bitou Wetland, as well as the Salt River and Groot River Estuary.¹⁶



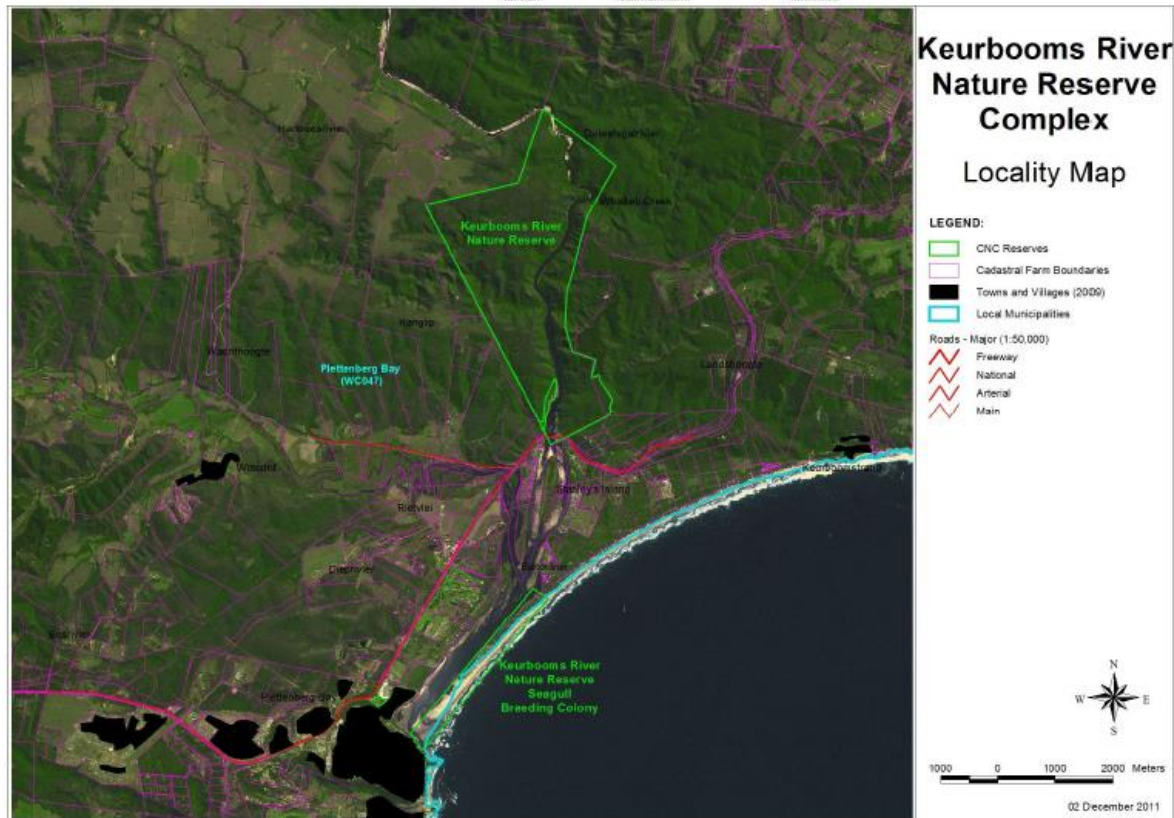
Map3: Map showing the Plett Hope Spot area in light blue and the MPA's outlined in white.

Tsitsikamma National Park and MPA is protected because of its ecological significance. It conserves seven percent of the rocky shoreline of the Agulhas Bioregional Region¹⁴ which includes scenic vistas and underwater habitats that hosts large populations of over 202 recreationally and commercially exploited fish (of which 15 are on the red data species list) as well as stands of endangered abalone and alikreukel. The MPA also has the greatest number of seaweeds recorded along the coast of South Africa (up to 25% of seaweed flora in South Africa) of which two are new species of red algae.²⁰ Surveys conducted between 2000 and 2009 in eleven rivers in the Tsitsikamma region, have revealed the high diversity of endemic aquatic invertebrates. Four new genera and 33 undescribed macro—invertebrate species was recorded.^{8,20} The Tsitsikamma MPA is South Africa's oldest MPA, having been established in 1964.

The Robberg MPA is protected for its historical as well as biodiversity significance. The Park has a rich bird and marine mammal fauna population and serves as a nursery area for fish. The submerged rocky reefs provide food and shelter to long-lived, slow growing reef fish that take many years to achieve sexual maturity. It also contains a Cape Fur Seal colony of over 5000 individuals.¹⁵

The Keurbooms River Nature Reserve, which includes the 7km section of river northwards of the N2 bridge and the Kelp Gull colony on the sand-spit situated in the Keurbooms River Estuary, is managed by Cape Nature. The river section was proclaimed to conserve the Afromontane floodplain forest, and

the sand-spit was proclaimed to protect the Kelp Gull colony. Both the Keurbooms and the Bitou Rivers are of ecological importance to threatened indigenous fish species and both catchments are zoned as fish sanctuaries according to the Freshwater Ecosystem Priority Areas project (FEPA).⁹ The river and estuary are home to IUCN red-listed bird species such as the Blue Crane, Half-collared Kingfisher, African Black Oystercatcher and Caspian Tern.



Map 4: Map showing the Keurbooms River Nature Reserve and the Keurbooms River Nature Reserve Kelp Gull Breeding Colony outlined in green (sourced from Keurbooms Nature Reserve Complex Management Plan)

Currently, sections of the Tsitsikamma MPA are the only no-go area in the entire proposed Hope Spot in terms of restricted activities and no fishing. The Robberg MPA is open for recreational fishing, but not for commercial fishing or offshore line fishing. However, Cape Nature plans to change this and declare sections of the Robberg MPA a no-go zone for all types of fishing due to increased pressure on reef fish in the area. The Keurbooms Estuary is a no wake zone all the way to the N2 bridge. From the N2 bridge, there is a short section where water skiing is allowed before it turns into a no wake zone again further up-stream. Fishing and bait collection is currently allowed in the Estuary with a valid permit.

In 2009, Blue Pebble Environmental Consultants were commissioned to create a Bay Management Plan for the Plett Area where a zonation map was proposed.⁶ This zonation is based on the biosphere model and aims to encourage sustainable utilisation in the area. The zones are divided into three zones namely:

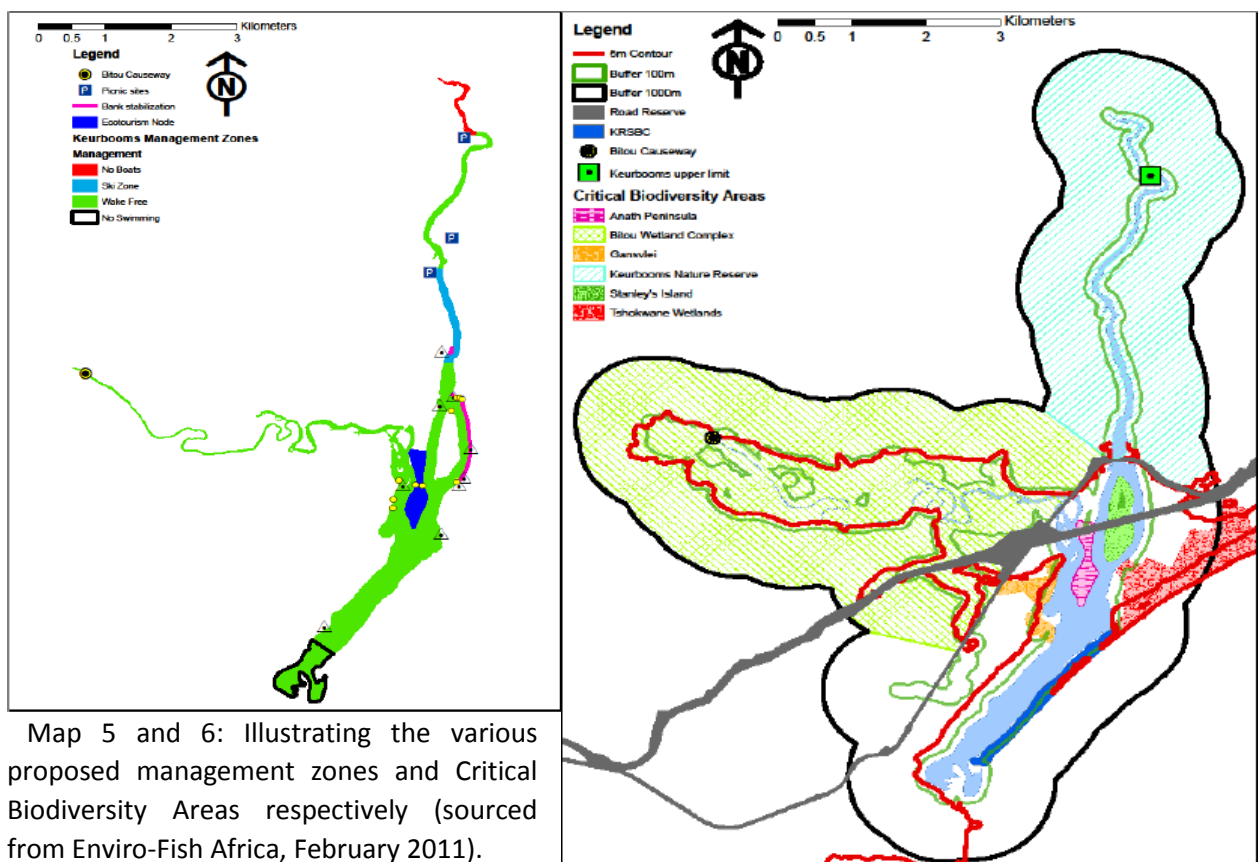
1. Multiple Sustainable Use Management Zones, which includes areas where all activities, excluding commercial fishing, are allowed in a sustainable manner;

2. Restricted Use Protection Zones, includes areas where certain activities are prohibited depending on the situation or needs of the environment;
3. Total Protection Zones are no-take areas.

The Hope Spot initiative should make it possible for all stakeholders to meet and discuss possibilities of more detailed zonation of the Bay area where all can be in agreement. Possibilities to consider are:

- For the Kelp Gull colony to be declared a no-go area where sea birds can safely nest without the threat of dogs, people, or horses trampling or disturbing the nesting area;
- To establish clearly marked zones with rules and regulations for crafts such as jet-skis in the Bay in order to protect marine mammals and bathers from harm including noise pollution;
- To declare the entire bay area as a no commercial fishing zone for 10 nautical miles in order to protect marine life for the local people to use sustainably;
- The Bay should be responsibly utilised for sustainable tourism, recreation, educational and subsistence fishing purposes;
- Only areas already demarcated for future development should be earmarked as such;
- No further development should take place within the high water mark or on the primary dune;
- No further development should take place within the 100 YHWM of the estuary and river;
- No further development should take place within the wetland area or 50 meters along its proximity.

Various NGO's already make use of the Bay for educational and research purposes. The zonation map can indicate these areas in order to properly inform the public and decision making authorities of important areas in terms of research and education.



Map 5 and 6: Illustrating the various proposed management zones and Critical Biodiversity Areas respectively (sourced from Enviro-Fish Africa, February 2011).



4. THE PLETT HOPE SPOT OBJECTIVE

The Plett Hope Spot iconic animal is the Humpback dolphin, a species in danger of extinction. The dolphin represents the spirit of conservation and Hope in Plett.

4.1. The Plett Hope Spot Vision:

To develop and manage the Bay as the best Hope Spot in the world in terms of the spectacular beauty of the area and its marine life, the outdoor focused tourism, environmental education and research achievements, social upliftment projects and sound collaborative management principles. To become a self-sustaining, multiple use marine and cultural resource management area. To be a leader in marine and coastal conservation and research initiatives in South Africa and possibly the world. To be a dynamic community that cross-pollinates and collaborates with each other in business, conservation, social upliftment, research, monitoring, and education projects.

4.2. The Plett Hope Spot Goals:

- To create a spirit of ownership and pride within the Plett community for their marine resources;
 - To create strong economic growth for the region by promoting sustainable eco-tourism and preservation of Natural resources.
 - To establish the Hope Spot as an intrinsic part of the Plett ethos and culture of the town;
 - To educate the Plett community and visitors of the importance of marine life and resources;
 - To encourage high quality ongoing research and monitoring in the Bay;
 - To create a platform whereby research findings can be made available to the public and can be utilised in a practical manner by decision makers;
 - To create a platform whereby collaboration and cross-pollination of resources and ideas can take place between different organisations including government, NGO's and NPO's, public, clubs and societies, and businesses towards the betterment of the marine ecosystem and Plett coastline;
 - To be self- sustaining in the long run;
 - To create a Bay where different areas are zoned and utilized sustainably based on sound information.
-

5. MANAGEMENT

5.1. Committee

The Plett Hope Spot has formed a preliminary committee of young dynamic individuals with different qualifications and backgrounds namely:

1. Mark Brown - Chairman - Ornithologist and Ecologist working for the Nature's Valley Trust
2. Natalie Buttress - MC90 radio presenter and Tourism Board Committee member
3. Gwenith Penry - Marine mammal biologist, zoologist and active researcher
4. Jared Harding - Coordinator for the ORCA Foundation
5. Grahame Thomson - Plett Tourism Consultant
6. Chrissie Cloete - Nature Conservationist

Tony Lubner and Mike Bridgeford are advisors to the committee. It is the function of this committee to plan the Hope Spot launch in December, arrange for fundraising, and establish the foundation of the Plett Hope Spot Initiative in terms of the way forward.

A larger, more structured committee will be formed after the launch, which will represent various stakeholders, including government, public, societies and clubs, business, schools and various NGO's. This committee will serve as a Forum to discuss the various projects and initiatives in Plett so that collaborative future planning and sharing of resources can take place. The Hope Spot Forum will also serve as an information tool whereby new research, new education and awareness projects, new social upliftment projects and new management proposals can be made known to the public.

5.2. Responsibilities

5.2.1. Coordinator:

1. Coordinate the committee members and assist them with their responsibilities;
2. Ensure that all responsibilities are met and all goals are achieved in a timely manner;
3. Maintain constant communication between the different committee members as well as the different stakeholders;
4. Keep Stakeholders up to date with what the Hope Spot is doing and has achieved;
5. Maintain and update the Plett Hope Spot Facebook Page and Blog;
6. Manage the distribution of Hope Spot public notices and publications;
7. Liaison with SST in terms of publications, promotion and funds;
8. Manage the funds with SST;
9. Assist the committee in planning events and fundraising;
10. Coordinate the different projects associated with the Hope Spot Initiative;
11. Plan the December Hope Spot launch.

5.2.2. The Hope Spot Planning Committee:

1. Plan fundraising and promotion events;
2. Plan awareness campaigns, competitions and events;
3. Maintain and update the Blog and Facebook Page;
4. Future Planning in terms of sustainability;
5. Support and assist the Coordinator;
6. Assist the coordinator in the planning of the December Hope Spot Launch.

5.2.3. Chairman:

1. Support and assist the coordinator;
2. Ensure the coordinator receives remuneration timeously;
3. Chair the management Committee Meetings;

5.2.4. Stakeholders:

1. Attend monthly Forum meetings (from 2015);
2. Inform the Hope Spot Coordinator of new projects (research, education, awareness, social upliftment) associated with the marine ecosystem;

6. INCLUSIVE APPROACH

The Plett Hope Spot aims to be as inclusive as possible, and hopes to gain the support and active involvement of Government, academia, business, and general society. The inclusive approach of the Plett Hope Spot, together with a neutral facilitator, will allow collaboration and cross-pollination between the different stakeholders in order to work towards the successful protection and holistic management of the Bay for the benefit of all involved.

6.1. Government

It is vitally important that all managing and governing bodies are supportive of the Hope Spot Initiative. The Plett Hope Spot committee has approached the local municipality as well as the conservation organisations in the Plett area with the hope that they will not only endorse the initiative, but also play an active role in the success of the future plans that we wish to implement.

6.1.1. Bitou Municipality:

The Bitou Municipality is an important decision making authority in Plett and, together with the Provincial and National government, makes the final decision in Gazetting MPA's. For a Hope Spot to be successful, the municipality needs to adopt the Hope Spot concept as part of their ethos and integrate it into their strategic plans, including the Spatial Development Framework and annual Budget. The Hope Spot initiative hopes in the long term to link the two major MPA's - the Tsitsikamma MPA in the east and Robberg MPA in the west - creating one continuous MPA which includes the Bay of Plett. This extended MPA will be highly inclusive, making space for all forms of sustainable utilisation with supportive research, monitoring, awareness, and educational projects to back it up.

Mayor Memory Booysen has already indicated his support of the initiative and will hopefully be a leader of the process.

6.1.2. Plett Tourism Board

It is our hope that the Hope Spot initiative will be adopted as an ethos and culture of the town of Plett and will be seen as an intrinsic element of the residents and holidaymakers. To this end, it is important that the Tourism Committee support the Hope Spot project as a whole and that Hope Spot events are actively promoted through Plett Tourism. This way, the Plett Hope Spot will feature in the annual strategic plan for Plett and thereby become ingrained in every tourism, conservation, and awareness event.

6.1.3. Cape Nature

The Keurbooms Nature Reserve (including the Kelp Gull colony) and Robberg MPA are managed by Cape Nature on behalf of Marine and Coastal Management (MCM), a directorate of the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEA&T). Together with the Bitou Municipality, they manage the Keurbooms Estuary. It is therefore important to include them if the Hope Spot initiative hopes to extend the MPA into the Bay. They will also be valuable in the process going forward in terms of providing input and the necessary skills to manage such an endeavour. Cape Nature already conduct important research and monitoring projects within the Plett Hope Spot.

6.1.4. SANParks

The Tsitsikamma MPA is managed by SANParks and if the Hope Spot initiative is to extend the MPA all the way to Robberg MPA, then it is essential that SANParks is on board and fully supportive. SANParks also has a fully functional Scientific Services Department, which will be highly beneficial in the future in terms of research and monitoring in the Bay.

6.1.5. The Garden Route Initiative (GRI):

The GRI is a facilitative organisation that aims to conserve and restore the biodiversity of the Garden Route through providing support for the sustainable management of the region and the delivery of benefits to the local community. The GRI also aims to establish the Garden Route area as an international United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) biosphere reserve, which is essentially the holistic management of an area in terms of conservation of biodiversity, economic growth, and social upliftment. The Plett area is part of the future biosphere reserve and therefore the Hope Spot initiative needs to be in line with it. The GRI can potentially also provide support through funding, endorsement, and facilitation.

6.2. NGO involvement

Several NGO's have agreed to, and are excited to, become part of the Hope Spot initiative. Each of these NGO's have something unique to bring to the table, and with a neutral facilitator and with the Hope Spot serving as a platform for collaboration, successful cross-pollination can take place where all resources can be pooled together to work towards a common agenda. The following NGO's have made a commitment to play an active role in the Hope Spot initiative:

6.2.1. BirdLife Plettenberg Bay

BirdLife Plett is a partner in BirdLife South Africa, the country representative of BirdLife International. BirdLife is dedicated to the study, understanding, conservation and enjoyment of wild birds and their habitats. BirdLife Plett supports and funds several coastal and seabird research projects in Plett including research being done on the Kelp Gull colony, African Black Oystercatchers and the possibility of establishing an African Penguin colony within the Bay.

6.2.2. Bitou Wetland Project

The Bitou Wetland Project is a non-profit organisation dedicated to the rehabilitation and holistic management of the Bitou Wetland in order to enhance the resilience of the system to deal with climate change, while aiming to develop it as an eco-tourism destination, which addresses the socio economic needs of the community.

6.2.3. Nature's Valley Trust (NVT)

The NVT is Non-Profit Organisation with a holistic approach to conservation focused on four aspects namely; conservation, education, community, and research. They run the Integrated Ecological Research Centre that serves as a hub for different organisations to work together in terms of research. The NVT runs the largest Conservation Education (CE) program in Bitou, last year reaching 8000+ people. NVT also runs a successful International Volunteer and Internship Program, and hosts postgraduate students from several universities.

6.2.4. ORCA Foundation

ORCA is a volunteer organisation dedicated to marine conservation, research, awareness, and education. They regularly keep up to date with- and support research that focus on the protection and rehabilitation of biodiversity and responsible socio-economic development in Plett.

6.2.5. Lunchbox theatre

Lunchbox Theatre is an educational theatre company that uses theatre as a tool to educate and create awareness around the environment and social issues. They also have a social upliftment element called Tshisa Talent, whereby they provide a platform for previously disadvantaged communities to show case their creative talents with the added benefit of potentially cultivating a career in the creative arts.

6.2.6. The Green Ticket

The Green Ticket is a Non-Profit Organisation offering carbon footprint offset options and enterprise development through reforestation, afro-forestry and food security whilst developing green collar jobs. They are currently developing a Garden Route Natural Science Research Facility, which will serve as a research hub in the Bay area.

6.2.7. Garden Route Natural Science Research Facility – Life Skills in SA

Life Skills in SA's research facility offers students and graduates from the natural sciences of botany, zoology, marine biology, and reforestation the opportunity to assist in the exploration of, and the recording and capture of all interrelated data of the above sciences for the development of the Educational Facility alongside the Research Station. University students are also able to apply their programs and syllabus leading to their (BSc.) (MSc.) and (PhD) at the research facility.

6.2.8. WWISA

A volunteer organisation that offers the opportunity for international volunteers to participate in several social upliftment projects including; green collar job assistance projects with women and youth, assisting in Local Economic Development projects through Bitou Social Integrated Development Projects, and participating in Life Skills in SA's social responsibility initiative.

The following NGO's have been contacted and have shown interest in the Hope Spot Initiative, but have not yet committed to the project. However, we are very positive that they will become involved in some way or another in the not so distant future:

6.2.9. Born in Africa

Born in Africa is a facilitative non-profit organisation that provides academic, social and life skills programmes in order to develop well rounded, independent, and successful young adults that will eventually serve as role models in their community.

6.2.10. Eden to Addo

Eden to Addo is a registered public benefit organisation with the vision to link three mega-reserves in the Southern region of South Africa, namely the Garden Route National Park, The Baviaanskloof Mega

Reserve and the Addo Elephant National Park by means of natural corridors to protect and restore the integrity of bio-diversity and eco-system functioning. Their work in creating healthy corridors, especially in the Bitou and Keurbooms River Catchment, plays a major role in ensuring healthy river systems, which in turn equates to healthy estuaries and ultimately a healthy marine fish population.

6.2.11. Bitou 10 Foundation

The Bitou 10 Foundation is a non-profit organisation that facilitates supports and develops initiatives that promote the holistic and integrated education of all the children in the 11 different schools in the Plett area throughout their academic career.

6.3. Academia

Several Universities, Academic Institutions, and Research Facilities play an active role in the ongoing research and monitoring of the Bay. Data collected and analysed over several years by these institutions and experts provide the government and other decision makers with vital information when decisions need to be made in terms of management and future development. This also provides the Plett Hope Spot initiative with a vast pool of knowledge and expertise.

List of Universities involved in research in the area:

- Rhodes University, Institute of Aquatic Invertebrates, Albany Museum - specifically the research of the macroinvertebrates in the Tsitsikamma Rivers;
- Environmental Education Unit of Rhodes University;
- Rhodes University, Department of Botany;
- Stellenbosch University, Department of Conservation / Ecology and Entomology and Centre for Agricultural Bio-Diversity;
- Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) – currently associated with research being conducted on the Cape Fur Seal colony on Robberg Nature Reserve, Dolphin research and with fish monitoring in the Bay;
- University of Cape Town (UCT), the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute of Ornithology and the ADU;
- University of Kwazulu Natal (UKZN).
- University of Pretoria's Mammal Research Institute (MRI) Whale Unit. Bryde's whale research, and the annual aerial survey for southern right whales (starting in Natures Valley, covering the area to False Bay).

Specialists, experts and consultants involved in research in the area:

- Prof Roy Lubke (Department of Botany, Rhodes University);
- Dr Ferdy de Moor (Institute for Aquatic Invertebrates, Albany Museum);
- Dr Peter Illgner (Working for Wetlands);
- Prof Charles Breen (Estuaries consultant);
- Dave Edge (Lepidopterists Society & Brenton Blue Butterfly);
- Kyle Smith – SANParks, Scientific Services Department;
- Dr Vic Cockroft from Centre for Dolphin Studies;
- Dr Steve Kirkman from Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) – leading seal expert;
- Dr Pierre Pistorius from NNMU.
- Dr Gwen Penry, marine mammal scientist and zoologist resident in Plett.

- Dr Mark Brown, resident ecologist.

List of organisations involved with research projects:

- SANParks Scientific Services – Biodiversity studies, terrestrial and marine habitat ecology and biological research of fauna and flora;
- River Health Programme;
- Birdlife South Africa and BirdLife Plett - ornithological studies;
- Nature’s Valley Trust – Fynbos, fish macro-invertebrate, marine mammal and ornithological studies;
- World Wildlife Fund (WWF);
- ORCA Foundation – mainly marine orientated;
- Centre for Dolphin Studies – mainly marine orientated;
- The Green Ticket - Carbon Accounting Research and development at the and the establishment of a centralised Research Facility;
- Offshore adventures, (Monica Taylor supervised by Dr Vic Cockroft) – seal colony studies;
- Cape Nature – Studies around the management of the terrestrial and marine environment;
- Garden Route Natural Science Research Facility – Life Skills in SA.

6.4. Business

In order for a Hope Spot to work, all have to be in agreement, including the businesses in Plett who essentially rely on the natural beauty of the Bay and the natural resources that it provides. Both the Plett Business Chamber and Women in Business Forum have been approached and have shown an interest in the initiative. Through further communications and negotiations, we hope to benefit from their full support and endorsement, thereby linking the initiative with the local businesses in Plett. If Plett Tourism agrees to drive the Hope Spot initiative and integrate it into their membership package, the businesses, which are members of Plett Tourism, will automatically become a member of the Plett Hope Spot, whereby they will be given the branding of the Plett Hope Spot to use in their business ventures.

Furthermore, the following businesses were asked to become more directly involved, because their business is directly dependent on the marine environment:

6.4.1. Ocean Blue Adventures

Ocean Blue is a marine tour operator, which offers oceanic safaris and activities. They are one of only two operators in the bay that possesses a SABBWWA permit that authorises them to get as close as 50 meters from a whale instead of the regulated 300 meters. This allows them to assist with whale research projects in the bay. Ocean Blue is the sister company of the ORCA Foundation.

6.4.2. Ocean Safaris

Ocean Safaris is also a marine tour operator, which offers oceanic safaris and activities. They hold the other SABBWWA permit that allows them to get as close as 50 meters from a whale instead of the regulated 300 meters.

6.4.3. Offshore Adventures

Offshore Adventures specialises in giving tourist the opportunity to swim with seals. They also support marine research in the bay and are always willing to accommodate researchers on their boat and assist

where possible. Monica Taylor has received specialist training in the use of seal disentanglement equipment.

6.5. Societies and Clubs

Societies and Clubs are major sources of support not only for funds, but also in terms of moral support and promotion. Clubs and societies also represent different parts of the local Plett community, which makes it easier to reach a wider audience for promotional, educational, and awareness purposes. It is also easier to arrange an event in association with a club that is in support of the initiative. Some clubs and societies in Plett are listed here. These are by no means the only clubs and societies here and not all of the listed clubs and societies have been approached with the Hope Spot concept except for the Bird Club, Plett Ski boat Club and Plett Angling Club. But is our hope that we will slowly reach more societies and clubs that will carry the Hope Spot flag into the future.

Societies and Clubs in Plett:

- BirdLife Plettenberg Bay – fully supportive as a partner of the Plett Hope Spot.
- The Plett Angling Club
- The Plett Ski-boat Club – fully supportive of the Plett Hope Spot.
- The Plett Rotary Club
- The Plett Athletics Club
- U3A
- NSRI – whale disentanglement

6.6. The Public

Plett has a very dynamic and involved community with various points of view on how the Bay should be managed. In order to prevent future unhappiness or conflict, we need to include the public from all walks of life, especially the fishing community that rely on the marine environment as a source of income.

6.6.1. Plett Fishing Community

It is therefore essential that a representative from the local fishing community should sit on the Plett Hope Spot Forum Committee. The Fishing Community will then be able to provide input on how we envisage the Bay to be managed, albeit sustainably and in line with what a Hope Spot stands for.

6.6.2. Plett Ratepayers Association

Another way to get the public involved is through the Plett Ratepayers Association. As representative of the majority of homeowners in central Plett, it will allow open communication between the Hope Spot Committee and the Plett residents.

6.6.3. Schools

Finally, it is essential that the schools in and around Plett should get involved with the initiative. The Bitou 10 Foundation already has a very involved relationship with eleven schools in the Plett area and therefore can help us integrate an education curriculum concerning Hope Spots and the conservation of the ocean. Further to this, schools can be encouraged to get more involved through individual projects such as beach clean-ups, fund raising and awareness campaigns. The NVT facilitates 6 of these schools as part of the WESSA Eco Schools initiative, enabling a direct link with the Hope Spot.

6.6.4. Keurbooms Property Owners Association

The KPOA is fully supportive of the Plett Hope Spot Initiative and very active in their community. They are involved in beach monitoring and clean-ups along their section of coast as well as the implementation of Fisherman's bins and signage in collaboration with NVT.

7. PROJECTS

We are very fortunate in Plett to have a wide variety of already established, very dynamic and proficient organisations in the area that are actively involved in projects that covers all aspects of a community based conservation. A Hope Spot is described as a Marine Protected Area, but with a more inclusive approach, therefore we have selected marine focused projects, that are already active and run by the participating organisations, that focuses on four different aspects: Education and Awareness; Conservation; Research; and Social Upliftment. We hope to bring these different projects under one banner – that being the Plett Hope Spot – where cross-pollination, integration and resource sharing can take place. Furthermore, we plan to develop new programmes and projects, using the Hope Spot as a platform for planning, funding, and partnership.

7.1. Schools - Education and Curriculum

Education in all forms is of paramount importance and so it is no different when it comes to the education of school children about the importance of oceans. It is much easier to get buy-in from affluent schools, but participation is more difficult. Even more so is participation from impoverished schools due to lack of funding. It is therefore vitally important that the Plett Hope Spot should develop a sponsored comprehensive school programme about the importance of the ocean, which will cater to all.

The Bitou 10 Foundation, a NPO dedicated to the holistic and integrated education of schoolchildren, gives the Plett Hope Spot an advantage in achieving this goal because they have already attained a strong facilitative relationship with eleven schools in the area. Bitou 10 can facilitate the implementation of a comprehensive school programme, developed by Plett Hope Spot, and assist in the integration of this programme into the school curriculum. They are also able to coordinate and facilitate new lesson plans and outings as they already play a similar role in terms of other educational programmes.

A similar NPO to Bitou 10 is Born in Africa. They have develop an Academic Programme (homework classes, swimming classes, art classes, tertiary education, after school study, study method workshops), Social Programme (social and emotional skill development for children), and Life skills Programme (exposure to broader environment outside, to become independent adults). A specific Hope Spot element can be integrated into each of these programmes. For example:

- Swimming classes can cover the basics of sea safety,
- Art classes can be given a Hope Spot specific art assignment which can then be entered into a competition created for fund raising by the Plett Hope Spot,
- Tertiary education can include a marine biology or marine conservation syllabus,

- The social and life skills programme can include courses or provide mentorship that will give them the skills to become; life savers, research assistants, and marine guides.

Both Bitou 10 and Born in Africa provides a facilitative platform to integrate an effective school programme into the school curriculum, but we also need to develop the content of the school programme.

The Nature's Valley Trust is the largest Conservation Education service provider in the region. The NVT has 17 outdoor classrooms include lessons on riverine and shell middens; and marine, wetland and underwater ecosystems, rocky shores and the ocean. NVT is also the regional node co-ordinator for the WESSA Eco Schools program and facilitates 6 Plett Schools participation in the program, which includes integration with the national Adopt a River and Adopt a Beach Programmes. NVT's programs are already integrated into the CAPS curriculum, and the existing partnerships it has will facilitate Hope Spot partnerships with these schools.

The ORCA Foundation provides ocean safaris where they teach children about the ocean and its marine life as well as the most pertinent conservation issues at present.

School involvement should not only involve lesson plans and outings, but should also include school participation in activities that make them proud of their Hope Spot and the special cause that it represents. In addition, they should be given opportunities to promote the Hope Spot in their work and fun activities such as with research, exhibitions, plays, films, photographs, drawing competitions and even public activities in small Youth Festivals. The following projects are possible ideas envisaged:

- The production of yearly school drama shows that promotes the Plett Hope Spot. These shows, performed by the learners, can be performed at the schools, festivals, and events;
- The implementation of Adopt a Beach Programmes in more schools within the Plett Hope Spot that will give learners the opportunity to get involved in research and conservation;
- Yearly photographic, drawing competitions or writing competitions that encourages the students to develop a promotional piece of work that can be used to develop a book or magazine about the Hope Spot through the eyes of the children. This can be a yearly publication. Impoverished schools would be the beneficiaries of the book and aspects of the profit made from the endeavour;
- The Eco-schools program can allow children to become ambassadors of the Hope Spot. They can then be given the opportunity to become involved in beach clean-ups, data collection, and their own conservation projects as well as given the opportunity to contribute towards the Plett Hope Spot Blog, Podcast, or Facebook Site with their own film, article, or photo.

7.2. Education and Awareness

Environmental education and awareness play a vital role in the protection of our seas, as it ensures that future generations are informed about the environmental issues that plague our marine ecosystems. It also shows them what they can do to change it. BirdLife Plettenberg Bay, NVT, ORCA, SANParks, and Bitou Wetland Project all have very successful education programmes:

7.2.1. Nature's Valley Trust Outdoor Classrooms:

The NVT have 17 outdoor classrooms focused on the marine, estuarine and riverine systems, all of which are linked to the National CAPS Curriculum. This highly successful programme reaches over 5000 children each year, making this one of the biggest environmental education initiatives in the Eastern and Western Cape Provinces of South Africa:

Riverine and Shell Middens

The Salt and Groot River interpretive routes include an informational hike where various water and riverine habitat issues are presented and explored. Also included are the geological, paleontological, and evolutionary aspects, which link to the unique aquatic invertebrate species found in the Salt River.

Marine (Estuarine, Rocky Shores and Sandy Shores):

Educational programmes from the Adopt-a-Beach curriculum that includes lessons on topics such as dune vegetation, pollution, and waste management to name a few. Additionally, interpretive lessons on tides, tidal organisms, and related marine topics.

Wetland:

An interpretive trail route along a Wetland in Nature's Valley. The classroom includes topics such as water pollution, the function of wetlands and plants/animals found in Wetlands.

Underwater:

An underwater learning experience at the Salt River Mouth. Learners are equipped with goggles, snorkels, and water wings. The classroom includes guided exploration of the tides, geology, rocks, reefs, fish life, marine ecosystems, and estuaries.

The Big Birding Experience developing birding champions for Junior and Senior Schools is run by NVT through their Eco-Schools Program, together with volunteers (Birding Masters) from BirdLife Plettenberg Bay. These take the form of formal classroom education and practical learning in the field.

7.2.2. Bitou Valley Outdoor Classrooms:

The Bitou Valley Project is in the process of developing several outdoor lessons/activities and theatre/drama programmes focusing on different habitat types (forest, thicket, wetland, river, fynbos), all of which will be linked to the school curriculum. An outdoor amphitheatre will provide a venue for young drama students and theatre and an indoor venue will provide opportunity for a laboratory/museum area, presentation and working area. Linked to this will be a small dormitory.

7.2.3. ORCA – Marine Outdoor Classrooms:

The ORCA Foundation offer educational days to different schools once a month. Children are taken on ocean safaris, educated on conservation issues, and most importantly, how they can apply techniques in their own lives.

7.2.4. Eco-Schools Programme:

The Eco-Schools programme is internationally managed by the Foundation of Environmental Education (FEE) in Europe and is implemented by 51 countries. NVT is the node coordinator in the Bitou Region for the WESSA Eco-Schools programme and has supported the schools since 2010. The ORCA Foundation also provide weekly lessons at Kranshoek Primary school to teach them about conservation, the main projects are to set up a recycling centre and to start an organic garden and compost heap. Some of the topics covered are river health, rocky shores, first aid for stranded marine animals, caring for and respecting our planet. Part of the eco-schools programme is the Adopt a River and Adopt a Beach Programmes:

Adopt a River Programme:

Children from the local schools adopt a river in the area and are given the skills to monitor the health of the river using the Mini SASS evaluation toolkit. The findings are sent to a National database. They are also responsible for keeping a section of the river clean and regularly go on river clean-ups.

Adopt a Beach Programme:

Children from the local schools adopt a section of beach and are given the responsibility of keeping that section of the beach clean and regularly go on beach clean-ups. They also get the opportunity to participate in outdoor education programmes focused on the marine environment.

7.2.5. Siyakula Pre-School in Qolweni:

The ORCA Foundation provides marine conservation lessons to children from the ages of 3 to 7 at Siyakula Pre-school.

7.2.6. Environmental Education Theatre

The ORCA Foundation sponsors the Lunchbox Theatre, an educational theatrical company to tour around the Garden Route to perform The Whale Show, a piece on whale conservation. In the future, we hope to get more shows like this touring around the area, which educates tourists, schools, and the local community about Hope Spots and the importance of the ocean.

7.2.7. Volunteer Education and Awareness:

The NVT, ORCA and WWISA run volunteer programmes where each volunteer is given the opportunity to participate in environmental education, research and social upliftment programmes. Volunteers at ORCA are given the extra opportunity to participate in courses including: marine guiding, research assistant, first aid for stranded marine mammals and more. These programmes create awareness on an international level.

7.2.8. Educational Centre

The NVT is a host of The Environmental Leaders Programme, an initiative from the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF-SA) to support the development of young graduates in the environmental sector. The NVT's Integrated Ecological Research Centre also hosts researchers and postgraduate students from various South African and International universities.

The Bitou Wetland Project also hopes to construct a Visitor Centre in the Bitou Wetland, which will include a reception/information/booking desk, an interpretive room/museum where meetings, presentations, and lectures can take place, a shop and a community run restaurant. The centre will run photographic, birding, guide training and botanical courses and will also serve as a function venue for weddings and small conferences.

Born in Africa have an Academic programme that covers tertiary education, after school study, and study method workshops as well as a Social programme (social and emotional skill development for children), and Life skills Programme (exposure to broader environment outside, to become independent adults).

Life Skills in SA's Garden Route Natural Science Research Facility offers students and graduates from the natural sciences of botany, zoology, marine biology, and reforestation to assist in the exploration of, and the recording and capture of all interrelated data of the above sciences for the development of the Educational Facility alongside the Research Station. University students are also able to apply their programs and syllabus leading to their (BSc.) (MSc.) and (PhD) at the research facility.

7.3. Conservation

SANParks and Cape Nature both actively conserve the marine ecosystems within the Tsitsikamma and Robberg MPA's and Keurbooms River Nature Reserve, but those areas not under formal protection

also need to have some form of conservation albeit not as exclusive. The areas which we utilise, are under immense pressure and should be managed sustainably. Several organisations already have established conservation programmes that ensure this and it is our hope that more programmes will be developed collaboratively in the future under the Hope Spot banner.

7.3.1. The Groot River Estuary

The Groot River Estuary is managed by the Groot River Estuary Steering Committee, a collaboration between SANParks, Bitou Municipality, the Nature's Valley Rate Payers Association, and the Nature's Valley Trust. It keeps an eye on water quality in the estuary, and collects data that assists SANParks in their management of the estuary.

7.3.2. Rehabilitation of Bitou Wetland:

The 654ha Bitou Wetland feeds into the Keurbooms Estuary, ranked 18th in South Africa in terms of conservation importance, but it faces issues of over-abstraction, pollution, and development. The Bitou Wetland Project aims to clear the Bitou Wetland and catchment systematically of alien vegetation with the help of the local community. Local labour will be used to construct - with wood used from the cleared alien vegetation - walkways, bridges and bird hides. Future plans to construct walking, birding, canoeing and cycling routes in the area with informative signage and interpretation centre, will further benefit the community of Green Valley.

7.3.3. Marine Debris Clean-up

The ORCA Foundation team regularly conducts beach clean ups. In addition, the amount of debris collected, where it was collected and when it was collected is recorded, which gives an indication of where the garbage is coming from and where it appears most frequently.

The NVT does similar beach clean ups between Nature's Valley and the Salt River estuary, and assists Cape Nature with regular clean-ups of the Keurbooms Kelp Gull colony.

7.3.4. Marine Animal Rescue and Rehabilitation

The ORCA Foundation and NVT, together with Tenikwa Rehabilitation Centre regularly rescues marine animals along the coast of Plett. Turtles are brought straight to the ORCA Foundation's aquarium where they are kept for a couple of weeks or a couple of months, depending on their sizes and conditions. They are fed and their progress monitored, and then set back into the wild. Other marine animals like penguins and other birds are sent straight to Tenikwa for treatment. Offshore Adventures have sponsored and participated in the design and building of a seal rehabilitation pool at Tenikwa.

7.3.5. Alien Clearing

The ORCA Foundation, as part of their volunteer programme, regularly assists with alien clearing in the river catchments and on Robberg Nature Reserve. The NVT co-manages the Nature's Valley Urban Conservancy, which runs alien clearing projects in Nature's Valley.

7.3.6. Animal Autopsies

Post-mortem examination of dead and washed up marine animals are conducted by Bay World and the CDS and assisted by the ORCA Foundation. The data helps us to determine the cause of death and will be used to identify possible problem in the bay such as oil and plastic pollution or sickness.

7.4. Research

Sound conservation and responsible sustainable management can only be achieved if it is supported by reliable research. Fortunately, the Plett area, especially the MPA's, has been studied comprehensively for several years and continues to be a unique area that reveals many valuable insights through ongoing research. All decisions that are made and will be made in terms of the management of the Hope Spot will be made based on sound research and expert advice.

7.4.1. Groot River Estuary Research:

The NVT together with SANParks Scientific Services conducts ecological research on the Groot River Estuary, which appears to be the only river system in Southern Africa that is completely protected from source to sea. Part of this research includes the following two projects:

Fish Monitoring:

Initial fish surveys in the Groot River Estuary, conducted in 2010 by Kyle Smith and his team from SANParks, highlighted the estuary as an important nursery ground for a number of marine spawning species. NVT is now continuing this monitoring project for the next five years, under Kyle Smith's guidance, to determine both the structural and functional properties of the fish community in the estuary.

Mosquito Fish Monitoring:

NVT is currently running a monitoring project, in conjunction with SANParks, to determine the population structure and relative abundance of alien Mosquito fish in the Groot River estuary. This study will also look at the potential influence of physical/abiotic and biotic factors on these components.

7.4.2. Tsitsikamma Rivers and Estuaries Programme:

The NVT together with SANParks and Dr Ferdy de Moor from the Rhodes University is currently conducting research in the main river systems of the Tsitsikamma section. The main river systems of the Tsitsikamma section of the Garden Route National Park require constant monitoring to evaluate the effect of anthropomorphic activities on the ecological integrity of each river system. These river systems are under constant threat of land use change and further development, with the exception of the Groot River, whose entire course from source to sea is contained within protected areas. Building on Phase 1 of the Tsitsikamma Rivers project, which examined the macro-invertebrate diversity of the rivers, they are now planning Phase 2 and 3 research projects that will lead to a better understanding of factors affecting biodiversity in the rivers, along with management outcomes that will help protect these vital river systems in a sustainable way.

7.4.3. Whale and Dolphin photo-identification data collection:

The ORCA Foundation takes photographs of dorsal fins belonging to several species of marine mammals in the bay and sends it to the Centre for Dolphin Studies for identification. This data can be used to assist researchers in monitoring the population dynamics of the various species. The endangered humpback dolphins are monitored especially closely and this data is being fed into a national program that aims to determine the abundance and population structure.

Opportunistic photographs of Bryde's whales taken by volunteers on Ocean Blue and Ocean Safaris vessels have been included in an ongoing project by Dr Gwenith Penry to estimate the abundance of the resident South African Bryde's whale population.²²

7.4.4. Cape Fur Seal Research

A new research project studying Cape Fur Seals in Plettenberg Bay. The project is led by Monica Taylor from Offshore Adventures, is supervised by Dr Vic Cockroft, and includes Dr Steve Kirkman, the country's leading seal expert, from the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA) and Dr Pierre Pistorius from NMMU. NVT, a partner in this project, will assist with manpower by sending interns and volunteers to collect data on the potential behavioural effects of the seal-swim tourism on the CFS.

7.4.5. Kelp Gull Colony

The NVT together with BirdLife Plett, currently monitors the three populations of Kelp Gulls that breed in Plettenberg Bay. Minke Witteveen through UCT is doing the project as an MSc. Other bird species in the colony are also monitored, including the Sacred Ibis, African Black Oystercatcher, Water Thick-knee, Caspian Tern, Little Egret, Egyptian Goose, and White-fronted Plover. NVT, together with BirdLife and Cape Nature, ring these coastal bird species, as part of a long-term monitoring program.

7.4.6. Beach Disturbance study:

The NVT and BirdLife Plett, in partnership with Cape Nature, are researching the effect of human disturbance on the breeding success of African Black Oystercatchers and Kelp Gulls in order to determine necessary mitigation measures to ensure successful breeding of these ground nesting coastal species.

7.4.7. Establishment of an African Penguin Colony on the Keurbooms Kelp Gull Breeding reserve:

Currently BirdLife South Africa, together with BirdLife Plett, are researching the possibility of establishing another land-based African Penguin colony, and Plettenberg Bay is one option being looked at. Other role players include the NVT, the Percy Fitzpatrick Institute, SANCOB and Cape Nature.

7.4.8. Indo-Pacific Bottlenose Dolphin Research and Marine Mammal Acoustic Project

Alejandra Vargas, a PhD student with NMMU, supervised by Dr Pierre Pistorius, is currently conducting a study on the Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops aduncus*). This study will contribute to a better understanding of: population abundance; spatial and temporal distribution; habitat use and genetic characteristics of the Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphin along the south east coast of South Africa. This data will enable individual and group identification and relationships between the pods present in the area between Goukamma to Tsitsikamma Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Emphasis will be placed on assessing the utilization of the current MPA network and identification of feeding hotspots and associated areas of high productivity.

Further to this, the Department of Environmental Affairs (Branch Ocean and coasts) and NMMU have deployed 3 hydrophones in Plettenberg Bay area. These hydrophones will be constantly recording vocalisations from whales and dolphins that visit the Bay during the year. This project will be part of a new masters student project from NMMU starting in 2015.

7.4.9. Citizen Science Programmes

The NVT, BirdLife Plett and ORCA all contribute to various national citizen science programs, contributing valuable data to national datasets. Of relevance to the Hope Spot are several virtual Museums (MammalMap, ReptileMap, LepiMap OdonataMap, EchinoMap, FrogMap, PHOWN and iSpot), and several long term monitoring projects (CWAC, SABAP 2 and SAFRING). These projects provide a novel way of integrating interested citizens with important monitoring work being done within the Plett Hope Spot.

7.5. Social Upliftment

Finally, a component which is easily over looked when it comes to conservation, but not in the least less important – social upliftment and community buy-in. For the Hope Spot to be successful, we need the support of the local community. They need to benefit from the initiative and feel as much a part of it - and just as important as the natural environment that we aim to protect. It is therefore essential that a sense of pride and ownership for the Hope Spot should be created. Furthermore, projects, started under the Hope Spot banner, should generate economic benefit as well as skill development for long-term future self-upliftment. Currently there are projects that can potentially form the starting point for what we would ultimately like to achieve:

7.5.1. Community Clean-up events:

The NVT regularly hosts a community clean-up event in Kurland, which enables the surrounding community to participate in cleaning their own community to instil pride in their surroundings. Further to this, they also conduct clean-ups in the Salt River and on the beach of Nature's Valley.

7.5.2. Community re-greening:

The NVT together with the Department of Forest and Fisheries (DAFF) conducts a yearly community greening event where indigenous trees are planted in the Kurland community.

7.5.3. The Bitou Valley Project:

The Bitou Valley Project is currently establishing four co-operatives with members from the impoverished Green Valley community. Membership numbers range from 5 to 20 per co-operative and training, set up needs and ongoing support is to be provided. In addition to this, through environmental projects (wetland rehabilitation and alien plant clearing), further jobs are being created. The project will address socio-economic issues, integrate communities, enhance social capital and human capital, upgrade the wetland and natural environment, and increase resilience to the effects of climate change.

Small businesses will be encouraged around activities linked to the wetland. For example crafting, a community restaurant, organic food gardens, mulching and composting using removed vegetation, construction of buildings and furniture using alien wood removed from the area, guiding, recycling and creation of goods from recycled materials.

7.5.4. Green Valley Creations:

The Bitou Valley Project has started a community project in Green Valley that enables the local community to produce quality, environmentally sound products, grow organic vegetables, and create food products for sale.

7.5.5. Bitou Birding Route:

The Bitou Valley Project is currently creating a bird walk with bird hides that will further promote the Bitou Wetland area. Guides from the local community are being trained and will directly benefit from the project. Training and employment of guides will include maintenance of hiking trails, anti-poaching and removal of snares, and water quality monitoring. The Plett Birding Route is being developed with BirdLife Plettenberg Bay and BirdLife SA.

7.5.6. SANParks Poverty Relief Programmes:

Currently, two of the nationally running poverty relief programs, namely Working for Water (Invasive Plant Clearing) and Coasts Care (Coastal Conservation) are operated within the Park.

7.5.7. WWISA Housing Project

WWISA, with the help of volunteers, funds and assist with the building of new houses and refurbishment of old houses in the previously disadvantaged townships.

7.5.8. Fisherman Education Project

The NVT, in collaboration with Cape Nature and SANParks ran a successful awareness program in previous years. The program included the development of a Fisherman's pack, with educational material on fishing regulations MPA's and the effects of litter on marine animals. This project is being re-launched in September 2014, with two German students running it initially for 1 year as an MSc project.

7.6. Public Support

Public participation is central to the programme (as indicated previously) as public support and public voting power influences decisions of government and business. Civil society needs to be involved in all aspects, including the planning leading up to the establishment of the Hope Spot and once the Hope Spot is established, the discussions, events, competitions (e.g. photographic competition), activities, and fund raising associated with the Hope Spot. Civil Society needs to be and feel like they are part of the whole initiative in a significant way.

We have already established that a representative from the Plett Fishing Community as well as the Plett Rate Payers Association should sit on the Plett Hope Spot Committee. This will give a large part of the Plett Community a voice in decisions made in terms of the Plett Hope Spot.

Further to this, a larger public meeting will be held at a later stage to introduce the Plett Hope Spot Concept and to allow the public to voice their opinions. All major decisions and new projects will also be announced in the newspaper and social media, where the public will have a chance to comment using social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as a platform.

Another important factor is to instil a sense of ownership and pride in the public for their Hope Spot so that they would want to support the initiative. They need to realise that this is not a closed conservation initiative, but an inclusive, people orientated initiative that recognises the needs and the value of the people living within the Hope Spot. There are several ways to achieve this, with some possible ideas mooted below:

- An element of the Hope Spot idea can be integrated into existing events including spectator sport events such as the Sabrina Love Challenge, The Easter Games, African Otter Trail Run, MTB Triple Challenge, Doctor Evil Classic, and The Wedge Classic; as well as Music and Arts events such as the Plett Fringe Festival and the MAD Festival; and also the Plett Wine Festival.
- A Plett Hope Spot sports team can be created to participate in the various spectator sports events, not only in Plett, but also in other parts of the country and perhaps the world. Sports clothing with Hope Spot branding, worn by the team will create a sense of pride not only in the team, but also in the people it represents.
- The Plett Hope Spot can have its own event that encourages the Plett Community to come together to showcase the uniqueness of Plett and its marine environment. This can take the form of outdoor sports competitions that make use of the marine environment, a marine conservation awareness and art exhibition, and a parade where each representative organisation or business in Plett can create a float illustrating a unique feature of the Bay.

- A community photo, art, writing and film competition with a Hope Spot theme.
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8. PROMOTION AND MARKETING

For long-term sustainable success, the Plett Hope Spot needs to be promoted, locally, nationally and globally. To ensure ongoing publicity of the Plett Hope Spot, we need to develop a promotion / publicity committee that can brainstorm and implement new ideas when needed. In the meanwhile, there are things already in motion that will promote the Plett Hope Spot until more ideas are developed:

8.1. Publicity

One affective way to ensure that the Hope Spot is noticed on a daily basis is to use a letterhead and logo that announces who we are and whom we are associated with. Mission Blue has agreed in principle for us to use the Mission Blue logo in the letterhead for the Hope Spot and the SST logo, as the local Mission Blue Partner and neutral facilitation body, will feature. We have finalised a specified Plett Hope Spot logo that will be used in future letters, articles, advertisements, and documents.

In the near future, we will develop a slogan to go with the logo that will capture the essence of Plett. The logo and slogan can then be used in advertisements, events, promotions and much more. It might also be beneficial to develop a car bumper sticker that people will receive upon becoming a member of the Hope Spot. These stickers can also be made available for a very small fee, at public places, shops, restaurants, and events; all proceeds will go towards the further development of the Plett Hope Spot.

It is also vitally important that the Plett Hope Spot should be promoted using all media and resources available to us:

- Weekly or monthly radio interviews with each participating organisation, discussing who they are, and what projects they are doing associated with the Hope Spot;
- Weekly or monthly newspaper articles providing interesting tidbits about the marine environment or even advise on how you can participate in the active conservation of the marine environment;
- Monthly cartoon published in the local newspaper about the ocean, using a Hope Spot mascot as a character;
- Youtube videos created by the different Hope Spot participants, using Go-pros placed under the ocean or just short films about the wonderful sea life or different projects in the area;
- Develop a Plett Hope Spot webpage, blog and Facebook Page, where any one is welcome to participate in discussions around issues positive and negative within the Plett hope Spot area. This platform will also create a space where videos, photos, and articles can be shared.

- A weekly podcast can be created, where people have access to interviews around various topics. These interviews can be with locals and visitors to Plett, businesses, NGO's, government and just about anyone.
- The Lunchbox Theatre can develop a drama skit about the Plett Hope Spot that educates children and their parents about the importance of the ocean. This will not only promote the Hope Spot, but will also produce some funds if performed at festivals such as the Knysna Oyster Festival, Slow Festival, and Grahamstown Arts Festival.
- Land Art can be used as a creative way to showcase the Plett Hope Spot.

Mission Blue and SST are excited about the prospect of South African Hope Spots and are in full support of the Plett Hope Spot. For this reason, they have prepared a joint press release on South African Hope Spots and have added South African Hope Spots to the Mission Blue Web pages.

SST have also arranged for a weekly radio programme on Algoa FM, which will showcase each South African Hope Spot. RSG are also interested in following the Hope Spot process and will conduct interviews over the next few months with the different Hope Spot representatives.

To launch and promote all new South African Hope Spots, Dr Sylvia Earle will be traveling to each new Hope Spot along the South African coast where she will talk to the media live from underwater for various TV channels. She will unveil a plaque indicating that Bitou is an International Hope Spot.

The launch of the Hope Spots will be linked into the launch of the book on *Splendours of South African Seas*. In addition, the tour will be used to promote other books, which provides us with the perfect opportunity to promote a book specifically about the Plett area.

SST is also in the process of developing a short promotional document / brochure to illustrate how beautiful our South Africa coast is, the superb nature of the Hope Spots and the route that will be followed by the travelling team to launch the Hope Spots. This top quality promotional document will be sent with a personal invitation from Sylvia Earle to some of her friends on the Ocean Elders team (including H.S.H. Prince Albert II of Monaco with the South African connection, Charlene Wittstock, his South African wife; Sir Richard Branson; James Cameron; Dr Rita Colwell; Jean-Michel Cousteau; Her Majesty Queen Noor). Some on their invitation list have an interests in South Africa.

Furthermore, Claudio Velasquez, with the endorsement of Jaco Loubser, of Home Brew Films have kindly offered to promote the South African Hope Spots by making a film for each Hope Spot based on their footage accumulated for the two series of Shore Line. The Plett Hope Spot film will be posted on a variety of websites, which have national and international exposure.

9. THE WAY FORWARD

In order for the Plett Hope Spot Initiative to be a success and to be sustainable, we will need the funding to employ a coordinator and to cover the everyday administrative costs. After that, we hope that funds will be sufficient to promote the Hope Spot so that a wide audience, representative of all communities in Plett, will know what the Hope Spot represents and what it hopes to achieve. The Plett Hope Spot needs to become a household name in Plett and the surrounds. It needs to be

incorporated into the ethos of the town not only in conservation circles, but also in business and tourism. The young and dynamic committee have the potential to drive this initiative to be highly successful and to generate support from across the board. After the December launch, the focus will be shifted to liaison with the different Stakeholders including Government, NGO's, Societies and Clubs, Schools, Business and the Public in order to promote participation in the process. A Stakeholder database, together with a project and resource database will be generated and constantly updated. Fundraising will be ongoing in order to fund different projects associated with the marine environment including education, awareness, research, social upliftment and conservation. The Hope Spot Forum will have quarterly meetings to identify needs and gaps in the project scope in Plett and will also determine where overlapping has taken place and how different organisations can rather work together to achieve a common goal. Constant public communication will be achieved through media in all forms in order to keep all updated of the achievements and successes of the various projects and initiatives. Ultimately, we hope to activate the Plett community into becoming proactively involved in the conservation of the Plett marine environment.

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