

Ugu Lwethu - Our Coast. A profile of coastal KwaZulu-Natal

Suggested citation of this Section: Mann, J. 2014. NGOs and CBOsB.J., van der Elst, R.P. and Oellermann, L.K. (eds). Ugu Lwethu - Our Coast. A profile of coastal KwaZulu-Natal. KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs and the Oceanographic Research Institute, Cedara, 178-179

10.5 NGOs and CBOs

The management of the coast is complex, requiring input from a range of stakeholders in order to make it effective. Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and Community-Based Organisations (CBOs) are playing an increasing role in the conservation and management of the coast. NGOs have emerged in the last few decades as principal advocates of marine conservation and coastal management in KZN.

Conservation NGOs can be membership organisations that have diverse memberships composed of community members, conservationists and social activists; or non-membership based associations of specialised stakeholders, such as scientists. As government priorities in South Africa move increasingly towards social issues, with seemingly less attention being paid to conservation matters, NGOs are emerging as critical role players in conservation. In the past, NGOs were criticised for only voicing concerns of “special interests”, ignoring the broader public good. However, functioning both as watchdogs and advisors, NGOs are showing increasing levels of professionalism, going beyond simply criticising and being “emotion-driven”, to working closely with various government agencies responsible for environmental management, and parastatals such as Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife, in joint efforts for conservation.

Conservation is the primary mandate of several local and national NGOs operating in KZN. These include the Coastwatch Project of the Wildlife and Environment Society of South Africa (WESSA) and the South African Association for Marine Biological Research (SAAMBR) respectively. Both of these organisations have embraced sustainable utilisation of

coastal resources as their conservation goal. Community-based organisations, such as the coastal conservancies, are also active along the coast and provide excellent opportunities for people passionate about the coast to participate in local conservation matters.

Coastwatch KZN

In 1997, a group of concerned conservationists serving on the KZN Conservation Committee of WESSA identified a need to focus on coastal and marine matters. Out of this group, Coastwatch KZN was born.

More than 50 people attended the launch at the KZN Sharks Board in 1998. The mission of Coastwatch is to function as an effective coalition of concerned people, working to achieve



A seagull observing its surroundings.

Photo: David Allan



the long-term protection and sustainable management of natural resources of the coastal zone and the marine environment.

The group consists of a core of dedicated individuals with either expertise or experience in marine and coastal matters and who have a passion for the marine and coastal environment. In addition, a larger group of experts are available to assist with specific issues. The general public also have a role to play as the eyes and ears on the ground.

Over the past 10 years Coastwatch has contributed to the development of a wide range of policies, white papers and bills, including the *ICM Act*, the revised *Natal Sharks Board Bill*, the *National Aquaculture Strategy*, the *Waste Bill* and the *National Environmental Management Act*.

In addition, Coastwatch was instrumental in the establishment of the KZN Provincial Estuaries Sub-Committee under the KZN Provincial Coastal Committee, which is required by the *ICM Act* as discussed in *Section 10.2*. Members of Coastwatch also serve on a range of other committees and sub-committees, providing valuable advice on marine and coastal matters.

Coastwatch is also able to exercise the public's mandate for public participation, which is entrenched in NEMA. Through many years of interaction with relevant government agencies and agents, Coastwatch is now viewed as an essential Interested and Affected Party (IAP) during these processes, providing the general public with a voice. As an example, Coastwatch was involved in the project to widen the Durban harbour mouth. From commenting on the initial EIA and the Record of Decision, authorities provided feedback to Coastwatch as a critical IAP.

For the above reasons, one of the most important roles of Coastwatch is the ability to comment on coastal development plans in the province. Through the creation of a part-time position in 2006, Coastwatch has been able to comment on over 100 Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) or Records of Decision (ROD) which affect the coastline of KZN. Coastwatch members were also instrumental in various rehabilitation projects following the March 2007 storms, ensuring that wise decisions were taken.

The educational role of Coastwatch is also important and the group's members are often called upon to give talks at various forums, for different groups and through the publicising of

their activities in the media. In addition, Coastwatch also mentors and trains public servants, many of whom are new to the coastal environment. Working closely with a wide range of government departments, Coastwatch is able to contribute to wise decision-making in the province. Positive relationships that have been built between various Coastwatch members and government representatives which enable Coastwatch to work with different departments to find solutions to many of the pressing problems facing our coast.

The South African Association for Marine Biological Research

SAAMBR is a unique, non-governmental, not-for-profit organisation that was founded in the early 1950s in response to a need for the conservation of KZN's coastal and marine resources. Over the years, the organisation has developed into one of the leading marine conservation institutes in Africa, both in terms of applied marine research and marine education.

The role of SAAMBR can be divided into three focus areas – to investigate marine ecosystems through the research of the Oceanographic Research Institute (ORI); to introduce people to the marine environment through uShaka Sea World; and to teach people using the expertise of the Education Centre.

Oceanographic Research Institute (ORI)

Since 1958, ORI has focused on using good science to contribute to marine conservation. Early research efforts focussed on sharks, turtles, linefish, prawns and estuaries. For example, in the early 1960s ORI pioneered studies on seventy-four, once KZN's most plentiful and valued linefish, now a no-take species. Those early results, together with more recent research (1996 and 2007), have proven crucial for the conservation of this species.

Another popular fish studied by ORI is the shad, stocks of which had experienced heavy overfishing. In 1979 ORI proposed strict protection for the species based on its research findings. Today, with stocks having shown some recovery, this difficult phase can be seen as a first step towards improving sustainable use of linefish in South Africa.

Now, decades later, ORI remains a centre of excellence in linefish studies, but has diversified to include a wide range of coastal and marine research projects from coral reef

biodiversity and ecosystem health, to coastal and estuarine management research.

ORI is widely recognised as a leader in marine research in South Africa, and ORI scientists have served on many forums that have contributed to the development of much of the excellent environmental legislation in South Africa. ORI was also instrumental in motivating for the proclamation of the St. Lucia, Maputaland, Aliwal Shoal and Pondoland MPAs.

uShaka Sea World

While SAAMBR and Sea World (now uShaka Sea World) opened in the early 1950s, by the mid-1990s it was clear that SAAMBR would need a new home. In May 2004, uShaka Marine World was opened. uShaka Marine World is a joint venture between the City of Durban and SAAMBR, and consists of a salt water aquarium, dolphinarium and associated Life Support Systems. Since opening in 2004, over five million visitors have experienced the wonders of the marine environment, and the uShaka Marine World complex has become one of the top tourist destinations in KZN. Visitors to uShaka Sea World are introduced to environmental issues and are empowered to contribute to conservation, critical for the future of our planet.

Sea World Education Centre

With its extensive range of marine environmental education programmes, the Sea World Education Centre reaches learners, students, educators and marine resource users from all sectors of the community. Hundreds of thousands of children visit Sea World each year, gaining an appreciation of the amazing biodiversity of our oceans. Through the innovative outreach programme, learners and teachers from disadvantaged areas are introduced to the sea through interactive lessons. In addition, adults, ranging from divers to local conservation officials, fishermen and rural subsistence harvesters, all attend tailor-made courses, which help them to use the marine resources of KZN more sustainably.

Coastal Conservancies

A number of coastal conservancies are active along the coast of KZN. Their role is usually threefold: education and public awareness; practical conservation; and lobbying for better enforcement and improved conservation legislation.

In the field of public awareness, the conservancies arrange guided nature walks and public lectures and often feature in

the local press with matters of general interest. The practical conservation work encompasses tasks ranging from beach and bush clean-ups to alien invasive clearing, training local community members and the design and maintenance of trails. These tasks are usually undertaken by dedicated volunteers who are not remunerated for their hard work.

The “watchdog” function of the conservancies is also important. In isolated cases, the conservancies have challenged huge mining and development proposals, at their own financial expense, with enormous local and national implications. Their close links to the community mean that they are usually aware of problems as they arise and they can provide valuable information to local environmental officers. Their linking of private enterprise with local and district municipalities provides opportunities for synergies, and their experience and knowledge is regularly used by local authorities during the decision-making process. This knowledge is provided free of charge, and has helped to make many wise decisions.

A number of conservancies have worked together with Ezemvelo KZN Wildlife for many years, as the process for the promulgation of new protected areas slowly takes place. These conservancies do not receive funding from any government agencies and rely on the local community and external funding agencies. Their funding is, in some areas, augmented by running a beach kiosk, food stall or small shop. More often than not though, these conservancies rely on the funds from their members, their passion for the coast and their hard work.

For a number of years coastal NGOs and CBOs have helped manage the coast and its resources in KZN, through communication and considered advice. The good co-operation and understanding that has been developed between agencies and authorities can provide some valuable lessons for other provinces in South Africa. ■

Copyright:

This publication may be reproduced in whole or in part for educational or non-profit purposes without special permission from the copyright holder, provided that acknowledgement of the source is made. No use of this publication may be made for resale or for any other commercial purpose whatsoever without prior written permission from the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs and the Oceanographic Research Institute.

