

PERSBERIG VIR GANSBAAI COURANT

Tel 028 – 384 1473

Faks 028 – 384 2397

courant@itec.co.za

PEARLY BEACH BEWAREA – VAN DIE LESSENAAR VAN DIE VOORSITTER, ELRINA VERSFELD

June is environmental awareness month.

Events and celebrations that are organized to increase the public's awareness of the Earth's "state of health" have become popular and widespread. June seems to be a particularly busy month in this respect. In fact, in South Africa and many other countries, June is celebrated as Environment Month with lots of activities, such as awareness campaigns, tree-planting ceremonies and workshops. The national theme this year is "Save Tomorrow, Today".

World Ocean's Day, which is observed on June 8, also focused on the future with the 2011 theme of "Youth: The Next Wave of Change". Many of the environmental events are focused on young people, as they are the ones who will shape the future of our planet. The state of the seas is of particular significance for South Africa, since the country has a very long border with two oceans: the Atlantic in the West and the Indian in the East.

Another important environmental date this month is June 17. This day marks the World Day to Combat Desertification. Over the past few months, citizens of the Overstrand area have been asked to consume less water. In some places water restrictions have been introduced. Shortage of water and aridness seem to be growing concerns. As a result, this date carries a special reminder. This year's theme is "Forests Keep Drylands Working". In our area where forests have been depleted over many hundreds of years, efforts that preserve or enhance them are particularly commendable.

Perhaps the reason why June is such an important month for environmental awareness goes back to the year 1972 when The United Nations designated June 5 as World Environment Day at the opening of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm. In any case, Environment Month 2011 is an important preliminary event for South Africa in preparation for the 17th Conference of the Parties (COP17) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. This important meeting will be held in Durban at the end of this year.

Written by Susanne Fuchs.

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