

TWO OCEANS AQUARIUM SUPPORTS LANDMARK COURT ORDER FOR AFRICAN PENGUINS

Media Release

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START The Two Oceans Aquarium supports the landmark court order in South Africa to establish no-fishing zones around six key African penguin breeding colonies, aiming to curb the rapid decline of this endangered species. On behalf of the Aquarium and the #NotOnOurWatch African penguin campaign, Dr Judy Mann, executive for strategy at the Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation and a co-founder of the #NotOnOurWatch, shares her expert thoughts on what this might mean for the future of African penguins and the health of the ocean.

According to Dr Mann, "The closures that have been agreed to will give the African penguins in several colonies an opportunity to find food closer to their nesting sites and we hope this will significantly increase breeding success in these colonies. Compliance with the closures by the fishing industry will be essential, as will effective monitoring of the impact of the closures on penguin numbers over time. These closures are an important step in African penguin conservation. The Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation is very happy that an agreement has been reached between the various parties."

She continued with a warning of caution, "However, we need to remember that the penguins still face other threats such as human disturbance in colonies, habitat degradation, the threat of oil pollution (especially with ship-to-ship bunkering, which involves ships refuelling at sea), noise pollution, predators, diseases and climate change. While some of these threats are difficult to mitigate, there is much more that we should continue to do to protect African penguins to ensure that they survive and thrive in the future."

Dr Mann expressed gratitude for the collective support and continuing efforts to protect the African penguin, saying "We thank everyone who has supported the various African penguin campaigns over the past few years. We look forward to continuing work with African penguin conservationists in the public and private sector to address the multiple threats facing penguins and as we continue to raise awareness of the ongoing need for action."

#NotOnOurWatch African penguin campaign

The African penguin is listed as Critically Endangered on the IUCN Red List. The #NotOnOurWatch African penguin campaign was created to drive movement and raise awareness about the urgent need for action to reverse the decline of the African penguin population in the wild. The campaign is supported by the Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation, The Florida Aquarium, Georgia Aquarium, and Zoos Victoria.

In the early 1900s, between 1.5 to 3 million individual African penguins lived along the Namibian and South African coasts. It is estimated that there were close to 1 million pairs on the West Coast's Dassen Island alone. However, by the mid-1950s, only 10% of these numbers were left due to egg harvesting and guano removal. Worryingly, since 1979, when the first count of the major South African colonies was conducted, the breeding population has declined from ~55 200 pairs to less than 9 000 breeding pairs in 2024.

With such a small number of individual birds in the wild, the population could be functionally extinct by 2035. This means that the population will be so small that it will no longer be able to breed enough to increase numbers again.

The #NotOnOurWatch African penguin campaign aims to raise support for wise decisions to be made by the relevant authorities concerning the future of the African penguin. The recent decision made by the South African government to protect foraging grounds in the immediate waters surrounding African penguin colonies via a court order, shows the positive impact a campaign such as this can have.

#NOOW is also about building pride in African penguins as a unique and charismatic species within South Africa's incredible biodiversity. If we want our children to see African penguins in the wild, the time for action is now.

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Image captions: Here is the link to a selection of images: <https://we.tl/t-lrI9LwRWwU>

Please credit images to the relevant photographer – name in file name.

Two Oceans Aquarium (1): An African penguin in the brush at the Boulders Beach colony boardwalk.

Two Oceans Aquarium (2): As Dr Judy Mann-Lang, executive for strategy at the Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation and co-founder of the #NOOW Campaign.

Steve Benjamin Penguin 16w (2): A pair of African penguins waddling along a beach on the South African coastline.

Steve Benjamin Penguin 19w (3): African penguins from a colony situated on a South African beach welcome the day under the soft light of a sunrise. These colonies are under threat as their species has been declared critically endangered and under risk of extinction.

With thanks,

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