



Basel Convention



Rotterdam Convention



Stockholm Convention



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## MEDIA RELEASE

### A CRISIS OF PLASTIC POLLUTION: FINDINGS RELEASED FROM THE WORLD'S FIRST PLASTIC-RESEARCH VOYAGE THROUGH THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE.

On Friday 10 December 2010 the Two Oceans Aquarium, in conjunction with the [5 Gyres Institute](#)<sup>[i]</sup>, the United Nations Safe Planet Campaign<sup>[ii]</sup> and Simon MAX Bannister<sup>[iii]</sup>, will host a media conference on the crisis of plastic pollution in the oceans at the Aquarium from 10h00. There will be presentations as well as opportunities to get aboard the research vessel, *Sea Dragon*, and to view the recently opened *Plastikos* exhibition in the Aquarium.

The 5 Gyres-led crew will release findings from the world's first trans-Atlantic plastic-research voyage in the southern hemisphere. As part of the United Nations [Safe Planet Campaign](#) crew member and pro-surfer Mary Osborne has pledged to undergo a body burden<sup>[iv]</sup> test as part of a global effort to raise awareness of POPs<sup>[v]</sup> and other toxic pollutants which are accumulating in the food web, including in marine life, globally.

*Sea Dragon* and her 13-member strong crew aim to arrive in Cape Town on 7 December, having sailed for approximately 28 days, covering 5391 kilometres of ocean. Led by the co-founders of the [5 Gyres Institute](#), Dr Marcus Eriksen and Anna Cummins, the crew consists of researchers, journalists and two pro-surfers, [Mary Osborne](#) and [James Pribram](#). The researchers have already found plastic in a part of the ocean most remote from human settlements. In his blog on 25 November 2010, Eriksen wrote, "We're as far from land as we could possibly be in all directions... in the middle of nowhere... one of the most remote locations on planet earth. What do you expect to see? How about a plastic water bottle?"

Eriksen and Cummins plan to produce the first comprehensive snapshot analysis of plastic pollution in each of the globe's five gyres. Building on [Algalita Marine Research Foundation's](#) (AMRF) discovery of plastic pollution in the North Pacific Subtropical Gyre, the 5 Gyres crew has discovered garbage patches in the North Atlantic Gyre and the Indian Ocean Gyre. No other researchers have been to as many gyres.

Eriksen and Cummins plan to sail across the South Pacific Gyre—their fifth subtropical gyre—in March 2011.

The 5 Gyres Institute is partnering with the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and Food and Agriculture Organization-led [Safe Planet Campaign](#). In addition to sailing through gyres, the team aims to advance its research into whether humans are being harmed by eating fish that have ingested plastic debris contaminated with persistent organic pollutants such as DDT and PCBs. PhD candidate Chelsea Rochman of UC Davis is leading this research. Cummins has already found trace elements of such toxins in her body. In collaboration with the Safe Planet Campaign, Mary Osborne has volunteered to join a number of other high profile individuals who have pledged to share information about their own chemical body burden to call attention to the need for action. The Safe Planet Campaign promotes the life-cycle approach to chemicals and waste management. It recognizes that effective solutions to the challenges posed by toxic chemicals and wastes require action be taken by a wide variety of agents working at all levels of society, from government, industry and educational institutions, to community-led initiatives, grassroots organizations, and the decisions of individual households and consumers.

The 5 Gyres visit to Cape Town coincides with the *Plastikos* exhibition which opened in the Two Oceans Aquarium in National Marine Month in October 2010. Produced by Simon MAX Bannister, *Plastikos* is a unique exhibition that aims to raise awareness about waste – particularly plastic and micro plastic – and its impact on the oceans, all through art. The works are made from reclaimed polyethylene plastic which MAX collected by hand from the shorelines, roadsides and landfills of South Africa. Incorporated into the Atlantic Ocean Gallery of the Aquarium, *Plastikos* includes giant sculptures, a spectacular backlit plastic rendition of the Earth as well as the entangled mesh of rope and debris entitled “Tangled”. Other elements of *Plastikos* include a microcosm of a littered beach to illustrate how our beaches are turning to plastic as a result of the careless disposal and poor management of plastic waste. The items on display were all collected from Muizenberg beach. “While we aim to inform people about the marine environment, we also believe that we have to play a vital role in changing people's behaviour. It is no longer enough to say to people ‘Please don't litter’ – we

have to urge them to rethink their lifestyles and to realise the power they hold as consumers,” said Helen Lockhart, Communications & Sustainability Manager for the Aquarium.

For more information about the media conference on Friday 10 December 2010 at 10h00, please contact:

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**Our Vision:** To foster love, respect and understanding of our oceans to inspire support for their future well-being.

<sup>[i]</sup> **The 5 Gyres Institute** is a nonprofit organization committed to meaningful change through research and education. 5 Gyres disseminates its findings through national lecture tours and raises awareness of ocean plastic pollution through voyages including that aboard JUNKraft, the boat built in 2008 of 15,000 plastic bottles. It collaborates with Algalita Marine Research Foundation and Pangaea Explorations, which provide it with a marine laboratory and research vessel, respectively. After studying the five subtropical gyres, 5 Gyres will monitor these vortices through Traveling Trawl Program voyages which loan research equipment to volunteer “citizen scientists.” See [www.5gyres.com](http://www.5gyres.com)

<sup>[ii]</sup> **The Safe Planet Campaign** is “*Safe Planet: the United Nations Campaign for Responsibility on Hazardous Chemicals and Wastes*” is the UNEP and FAO-led multimedia campaign for ensuring the safety of the environment and human health from toxic chemicals and wastes. Launched at the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum in Bali, Indonesia, on 24 February 2010, the Campaign’s flagship human biomonitoring project documents the presence in human bodies of hazardous chemicals covered by the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, including persistent organic pollutants, pesticides and heavy metals. See [SafePlanet@unep.org](mailto:SafePlanet@unep.org) , [www.facebook.com/safeplanet](http://www.facebook.com/safeplanet)

<sup>[iii]</sup> **Simon MAX Bannister:** “I am an artist traveling South Africa - creating along my journey, I donate my time and energy to creating ‘Earth Artworks’ that speak for nature, promote balance, healing and wisdom. Pushing the limits of your imagination to the ‘Max’”. According to Dave Varty, MAX is “an emerging contemporary artist with, in my view, a rare talent for provocative deep and meaningful communication through the medium of art created from litter cleaned up off the land”. See <http://www.maxplanet.info/>

<sup>[iv]</sup> **Body Burden** refers to “the total amount of toxic [both naturally-occurring and man-made] chemicals that are present in the human body at a given point in time”. See <http://www.chemicalbodyburden.org/whatisbb.htm> and [http://www.pops.int/documents/meetings/cop\\_3/meetingdocs/inf14/GMP%20Guidance%20CD/Guidance.pdf](http://www.pops.int/documents/meetings/cop_3/meetingdocs/inf14/GMP%20Guidance%20CD/Guidance.pdf) for more.

<sup>[v]</sup> **POPs:** Persistent organic pollutants (POPs) are a group of toxic chemicals which share particularly hazardous properties. These are:

- Persistence - extreme stability in the environment
- Bio-accumulation and bio-magnification through the food chain due to their lipophilicity (they build up in fatty tissues as POPs are characterized by low solubility in water and high solubility in lipids)
- Propensity to global geographical distribution due to their semi-volatility