



SOUTH African swimmer Sarah Ferguson recently swam 100km from Mozambique to northern KwaZulu-Natal to raise awareness about plastic pollution of the oceans.

| Wotly Wild

# 'My happy place'

## Durban marathon swimmer's docu-series released

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"IT'S my happy place" – that's being in the ocean for South African swimmer and environmentalist Sarah Ferguson.

To raise awareness of the massive pollution of the world's oceans, a docu-series of her daunting 100km marathon swim from Ponta Dobela, Mozambique, to Sodwana Bay, on the KwaZulu-Natal north coast, in July was released this week.

In 2017, Ferguson, 36, who lives in Durban North, swam Kai'wi Channel off Hawaii – the first woman from Africa to do so – and it was the preparation for that which laid the foundation for this year's challenge along the Elephant Coast.

"I did a huge amount of training for the Hawaii swim, an 18-hour non-stop swim, while this was a staged swim which took place over six days and was much harder.

"I chose the swim from Mozambique because it was local and much of it in Marine Protected Areas. There were a few micro-plastics on the Mozambique beaches and in the ocean. Along the iSimangaliso Wetland Park beaches, there were clean-ups clearing the plastic litter every day.

"A lot of this plastic comes down from rivers and washes into the

ocean and is then carried along by currents," said Ferguson.

During her six-day swim, she completed up to 18km daily, and while she had to combat winds and currents, Ferguson described it as an amazing experience.

"When I'm swimming in the ocean, it's my happy place. Some days the currents and the elements were with us, and I could go fast.

"Being so close to whales, dolphins and marine life was such a privilege.

"On the first day of the swim, about 40 dolphins came and interacted with me, and there was a manta ray, which was so close, I could have touched it. There were also whales about 20 metres away. It was incredible for me. Why I do this is for them. My motto is to live deeply and tread lightly. I love swimming in the open ocean and am prepared to put myself at risk to raise awareness," she said.

Ferguson, who is the Stop Plastic initiative ambassador for Spar Eastern Cape, said she was aware of the environment from a young age.

"I won the recycling prize when I was at school, and I've always hated pollution," she said, describing plastic in the oceans as a "massive threat" because it's suffocating phytoplankton which is crucial for oxygen supply.

Phytoplankton releases oxygen during photosynthesis which facilitates ocean health and provides the mechanism for sunlight to convert into food. It is often regarded as the lungs of the ocean and is the basic building block and important food source for other marine creatures.

Ferguson said the second major danger was micro-plastics which are now being found in fish which are being consumed and pose a serious risk to health.

She is already planning another swim next year, but the details are still under wraps.

"It will be my toughest swim yet, and I have to put on a bit of weight, so I'm having to eat a lot at the moment. I'm currently doing maintenance training and swimming 4-6 times a week. It's also that time of year when we have bluebottles, so I can't always train in the ocean. I also do strength training and pilates once a week.

"It's one thing to be aware, but another thing to do something about it and make a change in behaviour. We need every individual to do their little bit. The ocean is not a rubbish dump," she said.

The docu-series is on Facebook page: BreatheOcean1 or for more information go to [www.breatheconservation.org](http://www.breatheconservation.org)