

New Zealand-based initiative to map maritime pollution launched

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New Zealand —A New Zealand-based initiative to use the resources and reach of the maritime industry to map coastal and ocean pollution has been launched. The non-profit organisation, Eyesea, has developed a reporting App based on maritime navigation technology that allows seafarers, sailors, and the public to collect information on surface pollution by simply taking a photo. This image will then be incorporated into maps and charts, providing both local and global data on marine pollution.

Eyesea founder Graeme Somerville-Ryan said “When we looked into the problem of blue water and coastal marine pollution, we found there was very little global data on the problem. There were many assumptions based on small-scale data samples and PR-driven rumours, but there was very little-large scale georeferenced observational data.

“Our idea of crowdsourcing maritime pollution information gained traction much faster than we expected. We reached out to connections in the shipping, yachting, and superyacht industries and immediately saw there was a huge desire from people to do more to protect the oceans.

“It occurred to us that solving the pollution problem - at sea or along the coast - was going to be impossible if we didn't know, accurately, what was going on and where. We hope the Eyesea data and maps will be of use to clean-up groups, researchers, local authorities, governments, tourism operators, and a range of other stakeholders who care about the ocean and coast. Within the global maritime industry the idea has gained traction rapidly. We reached out to connections in the shipping, yachting, and superyacht industries and immediately saw there was a huge desire from people to do more to protect the oceans.”

Steven Schootbrugge, fellow Kiwi and CEO of ChartWorld, the world's leading digital navigation company, agreed to fund the development of the mapping technology “It was such a simple idea, and we immediately saw the need and potential of mapping pollution using crowdsourced images from phones. Ships, superyachts, and recreational vessels go places very few people get to see, they are in a unique position to observe, first-hand, the impact of human activity on areas that promote themselves as being picture-perfect. We don't have to just accept sailing in rubbish - anyone on or near the water can now be the ‘eyes of the ocean’, its protectors.

Eyesea looked at a number of countries to set-up in, but Hayden Wilson, Dentons Kensington Swan Chair, took a personal interest in the project. “Being approached about a good ‘tech’ idea is pretty common. But being approached about a good idea backed by some major industry names who are trying to just do some good isn't. In New Zealand we talk a lot about attracting international start-ups, and being a leader in global environmental management...well, here you go NZ.” A number of the Dentons Kensington Swan team were also personally excited by this initiative. We don't have ships, so our contribution was to provide significant pro bono legal support to set up the relevant entities and international contractual support.

Over just a few months, during a pandemic, and only through word of mouth promotion, the project now involves

companies and individuals from Germany, the Netherlands, Singapore, Norway, Cyprus, Australia, South Africa, the US, the US, Monaco, and Hong Kong. Volunteers in the UK, The US, Canada are testing the early stage application of the reporting platform, at-sea trials will soon be undertaken of 60 commercial ships, and it is expected the Eyesea platform will go live in early 2021.

Graeme Somerville-Ryan believes a new approach is needed to solve the maritime pollution problem “Our early data has been fantastic - fantastically terrible. The sad reality is, whatever we are trying isn’t working fast enough. Ocean and coastal pollution - plastic, lost fishing gear, and oil spills is mounting and the solutions are disparate, uncoordinated, and not at a scale commensurate with the problem on a global scale. Regulation, however well meaning, doesn't get its hands dirty or tell us where resources need to be put. The only way we will succeed is by working together - because we need everyone. At minimum we just need you to take a picture of what you see. It’s a place every person and company can start.”

Eyesea Officers: Ignace Van Meenen (Chair/Hamburg)), Raphael Seuleau (Deputy Chair/Monaco), David Furnival (UK), Graeme Somerville-Ryan (Athens), Nakul Malhotra (SG), Reinier Jansen (UK), Steve Bomgardner (USA/DC), Steven Schootbrugge (Cyprus)

Eyesea Ambassadors: Alex Hartnoll (SG), Alfonso Castellero (DC/USA), Andrew Foy (NZ), Brendon Hawley (SG), Constantin Baack (Hamburg), Ed Ewer (UK), Hayden Wilson (NZ), Hege Solstad (NOR), Ken Hasegawa (SG), Neil Godfrey (UK), Nick Fisher (UK), Oliver Schwarz (SG), Richard Turner (UK), Rob Aarvold (SG), Wesley van der Spuy (AUS), Richard Groves (AUS), and Vinay Gupta (SG).

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