

Make it the #LastStraw to help save planet

JANINE MOODLEY

LOVE it or hate, paper straws are a small price to pay for saving the planet, with many restaurants and hotel groups having switched from plastic.

The “no straw movement” began a year ago, with the food and beverage industry making quick work of adopting the paper straw or doing away with them completely.

The Two Oceans Aquarium in Cape Town was said to have started the movement. It banned drinking straws from all its food kiosks.

It subsequently started a #Strawssuck campaign that called on local businesses and people to ditch the plastic straw.

Various other initiatives, such as #refusethestraw, #plasticpollution and #singleuseplastics, have also pushed people to use their voices and purchasing power to stamp out the use of plastic straws.

The late environmental affairs minister Edna Molewa indicated that her department was looking at the possibility of reviewing legislation with a view of phasing out harmful plastic products, including straws.

“There are some plastics that are really not helpful and plastic straws are one of them,” Molewa had said.

In December 2017, South Africa joined the other 193 UN countries and signed a resolution to help eliminate marine litter and microplastics in the sea.

The Oyster Box Hotel in uMhlanga recently held their #LastStraw campaign where all plastic straws were done away with. Biodegradable paper straws are available on request.

General manager Wayne Coetzer, said: “As we are perched here on the edge of the magnificent Indian Ocean, and as a single straw takes 200 years to break down, it was paramount that we join the say no to straws movement in order to play our part.”



While paper straws have taken over the food and beverage industry, many people are still not happy with the substitute.

PICTURE: JANINE MOODLEY

Hospitality giant Tsogo Sun, which has more than a 100 hotels and 13 entertainment destinations, as well as

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- More than 1 billion single-use plastic straws are used and thrown out daily globally.
 - Plastic straws are not biodegradable.
 - There is no natural process that destroys plastic – even after hundreds of years in the sun, it breaks up into small pieces. It’s still plastic, and plastic lasts forever.
 - There are more than 18 000 pieces of plastic in every square kilometre of ocean.
 - Plastic straws cannot be recycled.
 - The 2017 International Coastal Clean-up picked up enough straws to make a line 145 times taller than the One World Trade Centre.
 - A dump truck load of plastic waste enters the ocean every minute.
 - More than 1 million birds are killed by plastic every year – many by drinking straws.
 - Drinking straws, like all other plastic, are made from crude oil – plastic uses 8% of the world’s oil resources, so it contributes to global climate change.
 - Plastic straws feature in the Top Ten items found on beaches.
 - Straws contain BPA, which is linked to many health problems, including cancer and infertility.
 - 100 000 marine animals are killed by plastic pollution each year.
 - Plastic straws have to be incinerated and as a result emit toxins.
 - Plastic straw production is said to be one of the most energy intensive processes on the planet
- Source: Two Oceans Aquarium

Ocean Basket, Starbucks, Game, and Afros, have also declared war on plastic straws.

MasterChef SA winner, foodie celebrity Kamini Pather, said: “While paper straws aren’t ideal for conducting liquid, because as a substance they are absorbent, it’s a small price to pay for the longevity of the planet when compared to plastic straws.”

She recently started a healthy food delivery service, FÜDY, that focused on using sustainable-sourced, biodegradable packaging.

Pather, who won Season 2 of MasterChef SA, said nothing should be left on earth except footprints.

“More brands that support the environment help society at large so that we can make small changes for future generations.”

Metal and bamboo straws, said Pather, were great alternatives and could be cleaned using a combination of boiling water with lemon juice or vinegar.

Niven Reddy, an environmentalist and campaigns researcher for the NPO groundWork, said paper straws were a good alternative even if they were not durable. “But then again, neither were the plastic straws.”

He said reusable straws, or no straw at all, was, however, the best option, even to paper.

Sarah Ferguson, advocate for plastic free oceans and founder of NPO Breathe Conservation, suggested that people do away with straws completely as paper straws, while biodegradable, left a larger carbon footprint than plastic straws.

“A paper straw is no better than a plastic straw. My suggestion is to do without a straw completely. But if you really need one, carry a stainless steel one with you.”

But, we are definitely heading in the right direction, she said, predicting that significant environmental change could be seen in the next year or two.

Restaurant chain Lupa Osteria is said to have opted for pasta straws.