



Multi One Attitude
Foundation

RACE FOR WATER

CONSERVATION OF THE OCEANS: OCEAN RACING HAS A ROLE TO PLAY

Plastic waste in the middle of the oceans... There is so much of it that it's forming what's called the 'eighth continent'. To battle against this pollution at sea, it's on land that our practices have to change. Ocean racers have a role to play to raise public awareness.

All sailors say the same thing: the amount of waste at sea is increasing. Indeed Swiss sailor Stève Ravussin paid the price for this in 2006, during the Route du Rhum. His trimaran hit a container, which was floating just below the surface. Today the skipper of "Race for Water", the first of the new series of MOD70s and ambassador of the Multi One Attitude Foundation, Stève Ravussin, says he is concerned about the pollution of the oceans. "One day, there may not be enough freshwater on land. At that stage it may be necessary to use seawater and desalinate it. If it's polluted this will be more complicated", he pointed out during the forum on "Ocean racing, a platform for sustainable development?", organised on 25 March by the Multi One Attitude Foundation at the Cité de la Voile Eric-Tabarly in Lorient.

The Multi One Attitude Foundation has in fact made the conservation of the oceans one of its major challenges. Plastic waste is one of the primary sources of pollution of the blue planet. Each year, 10% of the plastic waste from land ended up... in the sea. When you realise that annual production of plastic is reaching 230 million tonnes, it's certainly a cause for concern.

"The bags, lids, bottles and even nets abandoned by fishermen, kill thousands of marine animals each year through ingestion and strangulation. With time, this waste breaks down into small pieces, then into micro-particles, most of which float in the upper layer of the oceans and end up being trapped in areas with little current. They form whirlpools of rubbish which are so vast that they're referred to as the eighth continent", explains Maria Hood, special advisor to the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission of Unesco.

The data gathered by the global system for observing GOOS oceans (Global Ocean Observing System for Climate) enabled two immense concentrations of

plastic to be pinpointed in the North Pacific and the North Atlantic. Further whirlpools could exist in three other regions of the southern hemisphere, as well as in the Mediterranean.

“Their density may exceed 200,000 fragments per square kilometre, explains Maria Hood. Each fish caught in this zone has an average of two pieces of plastic in their stomach.” The micro-plastics act like chemical sponges in the water: they absorb and concentrate the organic toxins that are present, such as pesticides or PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl). “Their concentration in plastic fragments may be a million times greater than that which you find in the water. The ingestion of micro-plastics by fish is likely to lead to a very high level of contamination of the food chain if these substances migrate from the plastic to the organism”, says the expert from Unesco anxiously.

There are solutions for battling against the emergence of this eighth continent however: reinforcing the international anti-pollution standards; improving the management of waste and recycling, on an individual and industrial level; informing and educating the public, to encourage them to change their behaviour; providing assistance to developing countries and encouraging prevention.

To achieve this, observation of the oceans is essential. GOOS receives its data via satellites, merchant vessels, scientific soundings and measuring robots which drift on the ocean’s surface or deep down. The level of surveillance is reaching 62%. Offshore racing sailors can play a role in improving this figure. They adopt courses which are often a long way off the trade routes. “And every two or three years they frequent areas where our research vessels only go every ten years”, comments Maria Hood.

Race boats can carry observation tools, or jettison drifting robots into sectors not covered by GOOS. In this way a salinity and temperature sensor was able to be set up on “Forum Maritim Catala”, one of the boats from the Barcelona World Race. “Through salinity and temperature readings, we can study the circulation of the ocean and the atmospheric exchanges”, explains Maria Hood.

Furthermore, NKE Electronics is developing several scientific measuring tools. The Breton company has devised a data logger for vessels to observe the environment (CANOE) which volunteer skippers can carry aboard their boats. “Yachtsmen and women and racers traversing the high seas could improve the observation network. However, since the start of the project, some four years ago, we’ve had problems getting help from boatyards,” laments Jean-Claude Le Bleis, President of NKE.

Roland Jourdain meantime says that he’s willing to participate. “You have to make the most of us! exclaims the future skipper of the MOD70 “Veolia Environnement”. We already have several measuring devices aboard which we could place at the disposal of scientists, so we simply have to get together to discuss it. Each racer could embark a drifting robot too. Even if it weighs 30kg,

that wouldn't be a problem because everyone would have the same thing."

"I'm convinced that ocean racing has a huge role to play", adds Catherine Chabaud, who is heading the mission in the context of Grenelle de la Mer, which is an environmental forum about the sea. "As a racer-sailor, we see this micro-waste floating around, we have microphones set towards us and we feel a need to act, but we don't really know how to go about it. With the Multi One Attitude Foundation, we now have a tool with which to become involved in the struggle to conserve the oceans."

Further information at www.multioneattitude.com



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