



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Antarctic adventure awaits 17-year-old African penguin youth ambassador, Keira King**

Cape Town, November 20, 2023 – The #NotOnOurWatch African penguin survival campaign's 17-year-old youth ambassador, Keira King, has been chosen as just one of five South African students to fly to Antarctica in December.

“I’m writing an exam today, but I’m just so excited. I did eventually manage to get some sleep after the announcement last night, but I think I’m going to be excited up until I go,” King said early on Monday morning from Durban. “The main idea of the [Matrics in Antarctica](#) programme is to teach us more about sustainability and let us explore and experience life in one of Earth’s most remote places. When I go, I’m definitely taking my #NOOW youth ambassador t-shirt and it’ll be a bit cold, but I’m going to take photos of me wearing it in Antarctica.”

King flies out to the Land of Penguins, the world’s southernmost continent, on 6 December, 2023, as part of South African explorer Riaan Manser and Professor Jonathan Jansens’ Antarctic initiative. The project aims to inspire young people, who will finish high school at the end of 2024, to think about how they can make a difference within their communities to offset the effects of climate change and global warming. While African penguins are only found in South Africa and Namibia, Antarctica is home to species including Emperor, Adélie, Gentoo, King and Chinstrap penguins.

King has already shown her deep commitment to the ocean and its endangered species. In 2022, she completed the Robben Island swim in Cape Town, travelling 7.5 kilometres in freezing waters to support the Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation’s Turtle Conservation Centre. Earlier this year, to raise awareness about the fact that endangered African penguins may be extinct by 2035, King trained for three months on a prone board, which you paddle by hand, and made her way from Salmon Bay in Ballito to uShaka pier in Durban in 7 hours and 20 minutes.

In October, King and fellow #NOOW youth ambassador, Sophumelela Qoma, were two of the [stars](#) of the #NotOnOurWatch campaign’s biggest ever worldwide waddle on International African Penguin Awareness Day, which involved seven continents, more than 100 organisations and thousands of people.

“We’re so proud of Keira and, with all that she’s already achieved, it was clear that she would be an excellent choice for the Antarctic adventure,” said Dr Judy Mann, President of the International Zoo Educators Association, Executive of Strategic Projects at the Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation, and a founder of the #NOOW campaign. “Antarctica’s melting ice sheets tell a sobering tale about global warming, rising sea levels, the threats facing marine life and the ocean that we rely on for the air that we breathe and the food that we eat. It’s going to be up to young people like Kiera and Sophu to inspire the youth to care and to make the changes needed if we’re going to slow down the rapid rise in temperatures and the looming extinction of many species.”

Since the worldwide waddle, Qoma has also been busy. She launched a foundation to nurture a nature-conscious generation, she was a presenter at the vaunted [Sharks and Ray Symposium](#) in

Durban, she met the Mayor of Mossel Bay to talk about conservation and she's been working with and promoting the Plastic Changemakers project. That's aside from frequent youth outreach talks and being a founder and director of South Africa's Shark Research Institute.

“With young women like Sophu and Keira, there's hope that climate change could be arrested and that African penguins could be saved,” Dr Mann said.

#NOOW's worldwide waddle was endorsed by the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development as a Decade Activity.

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For more information you can:

- Access photographs of Keira King and Sophumelela Qoma: <https://we.tl/t-6OSQ26KHIF>
- Email [info@africanpenguins.org](mailto:info@africanpenguins.org)
- Contact Heather Wares, head of communications at the Two Oceans Aquarium at [hwares@aquarium.co.za](mailto:hwares@aquarium.co.za) or on +27 21 814 4539
- Visit the campaign's website at <https://www.africanpenguins.org>
- Watch the worldwide waddle's impact on 14 Oct: <https://clipchamp.com/watch/Sik2lNyOnpZ>
- Read #NOOW's press release about the declining African penguin population: [https://www.africanpenguinnotonourwatch.org/files/ugd/5307ab\\_600a35c8b0134701a25dd17bd94a3361.pdf](https://www.africanpenguinnotonourwatch.org/files/ugd/5307ab_600a35c8b0134701a25dd17bd94a3361.pdf)
- Access media resources at <https://www.africanpenguinnotonourwatch.org/media-and-resources>
- Look at #NOOW's television advert at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vr4yyjUZ-5g>
- Find out more about the United Nations Decade of Ocean Science for Sustainable Development: <https://oceandecade.org/>

### About Keira King

Keira King is 17 years old and attends school in La Lucia, KwaZulu-Natal. She has been in love with the ocean ever since she can remember, having been influenced by her grandfather, who has a passion for underwater photography and fish identification, and her dad, who was a South African surfer in his youth as well as being involved in lifesaving. In April 2022, she completed the Robben Island swim, which was 7.5km in 10.5 degree Celsius water and raised 25,000 rand for the Turtle Conservation Centre at the Two Oceans Aquarium in Cape Town. In August this year, Keira completed a 46km paddle from Salmon Bay in Ballito to uShaka pier in Durban on a prone board, which is paddled by hand. It took more than 7 hours on the water, but she has raised 46,000 rand so far for the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Seabirds (Sanccob), which rescues and rehabilitates African penguins.

### About Sophumelela Qoma

Sophumelela Qoma comes from Ngqushwa in the Eastern Cape and is a passionate advocate for marine conservation. She earned a Diploma in Nature Conservation from Nelson Mandela University and is now the co-owner of the Shark Research Unit and founder of an ocean investment trust in Mossel Bay. Sophumelela was featured in National Geographic Wild's 2021 Shark Attack Files and the 2023 Shark Eat Shark special premiere. With her dedication to outreach, education, and conservation, she also holds key positions as the African Regional Coordinator for Minorities in Shark Sciences, the Biodiversity Representative for Africa and Deputy Secretary for the IUCN African Protected Areas Congress youth programme, is a Dive Fellow at the Nature Environment & Wildlife Conservation Trust, and is a Keep Fin Alive Ambassador.

### About the #NotOnOurWatch campaign

#NOOW was conceptualised in 2022 after scientists and conservationists agreed there needed to be a public action project to try to stop the functional extinction of the unique African penguin by 2035. The campaign kicked off in March 2023 and its goal is to raise awareness, gather support and take action to reverse the decline of the African penguin population in the wild. Public support in South Africa and around the world, including in the USA, Europe, Asia, Australia and South America will help to ensure that the South African government, the conservation community and private industry work together to make wise decisions concerning the future of the African penguin.

The campaign was made possible with support from the Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation, The Florida Aquarium, Georgia Aquarium and Zoos Victoria.

### These were the more than 100 organisations involved in the worldwide waddle on International African Penguin Awareness Day on 14 October, 2023:

Adventure Aquarium, Adventure Obstacle Training, Animal ocean, Mawson Station for the Australian Antarctic Division, the African Penguin & Seabird Sanctuary, Animalman.052, Aquarium Pula, Atoa Kobe, AZA SAFE, AZA, The Bateleurs, Betty's Bay parkrun, Betty's Bay Conservancy, Cape Cadogan Boutique Hotel, the Cape Parrot Project, CapeNature, Century City parkrun, Chiba Zoo, Chikozan Zoo, Coffee on Clarence, Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, Denver Zoo, Divetek, Downtown Aquarium, Dyer Island Conservation Trust, European Association of Zoos and Aquaria, Eco Maties, Eco Zoo, the Edge Mountain Retreat, Environment for the Americas, False Bay Yacht Club, The Florida Aquarium, Fundacion Mundomar, Gallifrey Foundation, Georgia Aquarium, Guardians of the Deep, Hansie en Grietjie, Henson Robinson Zoo, Hero in my Hood, Hogsback parkrun, I Am Water, the International Zoo Educators Association, the Johannesburg Zoo, KAFC, Kobe Animals and Plants, Kogelberg Biosphere, Lehigh Valley Zoo, Les Terres de Nataé, Lion Country Safari, Little Rock Zoo, Louisville Zoo, Macquarie Island, Marine Dynamics, Maryland Zoo, Miami Seaquarium, Miyazaki City Phoenix Zoo, Monterey Bay Aquarium, MORE Family, Mozambique supporters, Mystic Aquarium, Nagasaki Penguin Aquarium, National Aviary, National Zoological Gardens, Ngiri Safaris, NIFREL, Noriko Hiroto, Ocean Pledge, Osaka Aquarium, Sentinel Ocean Alliance, Penguin Ikimono Academy, Penguin Promises, the Penguin Protection Parade, Penguins International, Pic-a-Tee, Pohatu Penguin Conservation Trust, Point parkrun, Port of Nagoya Public Aquarium, Pueblo Zoo, Punta San Juan, Ripley's, SAAMBR, Sea Life, SeaWorld Yas Island, Secret Sunrise Durban, Shikoku Aquarium, Siso Dwana, Sunshine Aquarium, Toronto Zoo, the Two Oceans Aquarium, the Two Oceans Aquarium Foundation, Tourvest, Ueno Zoo, the UN Ocean Decade, Under the Oaks Market, Urgent Paws Vet Clinic, uShaka Sea World, Vancouver Aquarium, Waddle on by Marts, World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, West Edmonton Mall, Wrocław Zoo, The Black Mermaid, Toronto Zoo, Tsugumi Ceramics Studio, Zoomarine Roma, Zoo Tampa.

### These countries had institutions that took part in the worldwide waddle:

Japan, Australia, Tasmania, New Zealand, Abu Dhabi in the UAE, Mozambique, South Africa, France, Croatia, Poland, Italy, Canada, the U.S.A., Chile and Peru.



**2021** United Nations Decade  
**2030** of Ocean Science  
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