

Sailors for the Sea: Sailing Towards Ocean Health

By Jonathon Fleming

Jennifer Brett, an experienced sailor with over 20 years on the water, spent a decade living aboard her sailboat, Lyra, with her family. During this time, sailing became more than just a passion – it became a way of life. Living off-grid fostered a deep connection with the ocean, where Jennifer saw firsthand the environmental challenges our seas face. Today, as the Communications Manager for Sailors for the Sea, she channels that connection into meaningful action.

Founded in 2004 by David Rockefeller, Jr. and Dr. David Treadway, Sailors for the Sea has long recognized that sailors and boaters are perfectly positioned to be champions for ocean conservation. "Being so closely tied to the ocean, sailors are in an ideal position to lead efforts to protect our seas," Jennifer explains. The organization's mission is clear: engage, educate, and activate the sailing community to restore ocean health.

Small Changes, Big Impact

Jennifer emphasizes that sustainability doesn't have to be overwhelming. "Sometimes it's about the small, simple actions – like reducing single-use plastics or installing solar panels on your boat. Even switching to eco-friendly sunscreens makes a difference. Every step matters."

In 2018, Sailors for the Sea partnered with Oceana, the world's largest international advocacy organization dedicated solely to ocean conservation. This powerful alliance has strengthened their ability to drive policy changes, extending their influence far beyond the water.

The Core Programmes

Sailors for the Sea has developed three key programmes to further their mission:

Green Boating: The backbone of their efforts, the Green Boating programme educates sailors on sustainable practices. Members receive a comprehensive Green Boating Guide, which covers everything from waste reduction to wildlife protection. With over 34,000 members, this programme has sparked initiatives like protecting the North Atlantic right whale.

Clean Regattas: Celebrating 15 years of success, this certification programme empowers regatta organisers to adopt eco-friendly practices. From reducing waste to offsetting carbon footprints, organisers can achieve bronze, silver, gold, or platinum certification. Over 2,800 events have been certified, reaching 750,000 sailors across the globe, including New Zealand and Oman, where the 2021 Youth Sailing World Championships will be held.

KELP (Kids Environmental Lesson Plans): Originally designed for junior sailors, KELP has expanded to reach over 300,000 children in 76 countries. These free, engaging marine science activities cover a wide range of topics – from coral reefs to how whales breathe – inspiring the next generation of ocean advocates.

Taking Action

Jennifer is adamant that real change starts with raising awareness. "Be the squeaky wheel," she urges. "Reach out to your representatives about environmental issues. You'll be surprised how quickly your voice can inspire others to act."

If you're ready to get involved, visit sailorsforthesea.org to sign up for the Green Boating programme, register a Clean Regatta, or download KELP lesson plans. Every action, no matter how small, brings us one step closer to restoring ocean health.