



# A Worthwhile Experience

**Written by Sue Woods**

*July 2019. As owner of M/Y Solita, Sue shares her firsthand experience as a citizen scientist on the UMT Ocean Monitoring Project run by Universiti Malaysia Terengganu and International SeaKeepers Society, Asia .*

They say you make your own luck. Still, we feel very lucky to be living the life we do. My husband John and I have been cruising through South East Asia on our 47-foot motor boat Solita for the past 9 years. In 2010 we took early retirement, simplified our financial affairs and material possessions, loaded the boat and left Australia for more northern climes.

Since leaving Australia we have visited many coastal areas of Indonesia, Borneo, the Philippines, Brunei, Peninsula Malaysia and Thailand. We have also managed a little land travel in those countries and in Cambodia, Hong Kong and Vietnam.

We have met so many wonderful people and seen such amazing sights throughout South East Asia. The cruising has been spectacular at times, and we have enjoyed swimming and snorkeling in some seriously gorgeous places. Unfortunately, there has been one ever present problem everywhere we go. That problem is pollution.

Air pollution, while present in every large town and city, is less of a concern to the average “yachteer” as we travel offshore, enjoying sea breezes and clean air. Collections of garbage and refuse polluting the land is a serious problem that seems to be affecting every country we visit. It’s collection and treatment seems to be a very “hit and miss” affair, with different local policies even within the one country.

However, water pollution is our main concern. From a selfish point of view, we deplore the floating old ropes and lines, nets, rice bags and hundreds of other types of rubbish floating in the sea, as it can foul our propeller and water intakes. Most people don’t see the lines of garbage floating along current lines, the build-up of flotsam and jetsam that lands on otherwise pristine beaches of islands, the clogged waterways where the tide has deposited tons of floating rubbish, the numbers of sea birds and marine life that become entangled in, or ingest, rubbish in the water.

And this is just what we can see. What is happening at a microscopic level, with minute specks of plastic or other material dispersed into the sea? How are the tiny sea creatures, often the building blocks of marine life, coping with a poisoned environment?

While we are aware of the enormous problems of ocean pollution, there is only so much we can do on a personal level to help. We manage our own garbage so our plastics, tins, bottles and any other non-compostable items don't end up in the sea. We are happy to help with beach clean-up campaigns. We financially support turtle and other sea life rehabilitation programs where marine life has been damaged by environmental pollution. We discourage the use of single-use plastic bags and bottles by using our own reusable shopping bags and water cups, refusing straws and plastic cups when eating out. We support any ideas to limit the amount of pollution in the seas and beaches. Like most yachtees, we are happy to do more to help if it could fit in with our roaming lifestyle.

One day we noticed a posting in an on-line cruiser's forum, asking for participants in a water sampling project, and so began our involvement with SeaKeepers Asia!

Gail Tay enthusiastically described the project, jointly run by the International SeaKeepers Society Asia and the Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, and we submitted our future cruising plans, hoping we could help along our way. Dr Poh agreed samples along our proposed route would be useful and he brought to us in Johor Bahru all the equipment needed for sampling.

We began our water sampling in early June, as we made our way from Seban Cove marina, Johor Bahru, towards Terengganu. At our first sampling stop we measured the amount of water travelling through the pump and hose in 10 minutes, necessary for calculating the amount of water flowing through the "drogue" during the surface sampling. We made some adjustments to the equipment to better suit our boat - John installed an electrical connection from our 12-volt battery to the sampling water pump and added a dive weight to keep it under water during the sampling. He also rigged a snap shackle to suspend high over our duckboard, so we could easily hang the sampling "drogue" while washing it down. After that the sampling sessions were very easy to do. We could do both the surface and the deeper samples within 25 minutes. Our only problem was very windy weather, when we couldn't stop to take samples because of the two metre swells. This caused us to miss two potential sampling sites.

We arrived in Terengganu in late June, when we met Gail and the team face-to-face for the handover of the water samples. Everyone was so friendly and helpful. We were very happy to have been of assistance, and hopeful that our samples are useful for Dr Poh and his workmates.

We will be available for this duty whenever we can fit SeaKeepers needs with our travels, and we would strongly encourage other yachtees to offer their assistance whenever possible to this very worthwhile project.

## **About the UMT OCEAN MONITORING PROJECT**

On-site data is crucial to help researchers and scientists evaluate the level of pollution in our marine environment. The UMT Ocean Monitoring is a research and monitoring project that involves collecting data through water sampling in the waters of Peninsular Malaysia. Interested boaters and yacht owners acting as Citizen Scientists assist to collect these water samples along their sailing route.

This community-based research project has the potential to make significant contributions to the advancement of marine sciences and environmental protection awareness. The data collected from the research undertaken will provide insights as to how the marine ecosystem is affected by the emerging microplastics pollutants that in turn impact the livelihoods of the coastal communities and the food chain.

Helping hands and yachts are needed for this research and monitoring project which is initiated by the Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT) and in collaboration with the International SeaKeepers Society, Asia.

If you're interested to be part of the ongoing UMT Ocean Monitoring Project, please contact [gail.tay@seakeepers.org](mailto:gail.tay@seakeepers.org) for further information.

## **UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA TERENGGANU**

Representing the marine-focused Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, the UMT team spearheading the Ocean Monitoring Project includes Dr Poh Seng Chee, an environmental chemist, marine biologists Dr James Tan Chun Hong and Dr Muhammad Hafiz Borkhanuddin, and Dr Siti Nurtahirah Jaafar, a biochemist. Dr Poh is leading the project and his role is to assess and advise the public about how chemicals move through the environment and their effects on human health and the environment itself.

[www.umt.edu.my](http://www.umt.edu.my)

## **SEAKEEPERS ASIA**

The International SeaKeepers Society is a non-profit organisation focusing on the health of the world's oceans and climate. Building upon established international programming, the Asia chapter's mission is to save the oceans by applying the SeaKeepers motto: Research, Educate, Protect and Restore.

The SeaKeepers DISCOVERY Yachts Program is our foremost initiative in accomplishing our mission and goals. This program supports marine science and conservation by utilizing privately owned vessels as platforms for marine research, educational outreach, and to deploy oceanographic instruments. Vessel owners who provide the support of their private yachts help to reduce costs which allows the scientists to focus more time and funds on research. [www.seakeepers.org/singapore](http://www.seakeepers.org/singapore)