



PUPILS ON A MISSION: Pupils from Ukhanyo Secondary School and Alexandria High School marched in protest of climate change last Thursday, ask why government and big business seem reluctant to help resolve the problems that will affect them directly in years to come

School pupils march to save the planet

ROB KNOWLES

Joining other young people around the world in a Climate Strike, pupils of Ukhanyo Secondary School in KwaNonqubela, assisted by grade 8 pupils from Alexandria High School, led a peaceful protest last Thursday to highlight the problems of climate change.

The march was organised under the guidance of Christiaan Bakkes and his wife Marcia Fagnoli, two environmentalists who train young people from vulnerable backgrounds in becoming nature guides through the

Kariega Foundation's Environmental Education Project.

Bakkes is South African and Fagnoli hails from the USA.

The couple were active in rhino conservation while living in Namibia.

"These children are going to be the most affected by the change in climate but have done the least to cause the problem," Fagnoli said.

"SA as a whole is living beyond its limits, and we are running out of resources the youth will need in order to have basic survival in the future.

"Many youth around the world are overwhelmed with

anxiety by scientific facts published by the World Health Organisation and the United Nations about the environmental crisis they will be faced with in their lifetimes unless drastic measures are taken.

"The pupils in the rural Eastern Cape must not be forgotten," Bakkes said.

"Ukhanyo grade 11 pupils decided to form their own student environmental committee to start tackling issues locally

and globally."

Last Thursday marked the first global Climate Strike to protest climate change that saw millions of schoolchildren putting down their pens and schoolwork to take part in the world-wide initiative.

Bakkes and Fagnoli helped arrange the march with Ukhanyo teacher Thulisa Buwa. SANParks rangers from Addo Elephant Park along with interns from the Unzi Wethu Wilderness Foundation

joined the march in a show of solidarity.

They were supported by Ndlambe Expanded Public Works Programme workers in Alexandria, and Kariega volunteers from the USA, Austria, Germany and Britain added international support.

The Kariega Anti-Poaching Unit and Kariega Foundation community coordinator and sports coaches marched and served as marshals while the police and traffic department ensured

safety.

The pupils carried placards with messages including, "Save the

Oceans", "Let's be green" and "Climate action now!"

"There was chanting,

singing, dancing and sloganeering as only South Africans can," said Fagnoli.