

Annual General Meeting 2019 International Yachting Fellowship of Rotarians



From 24 to 27 October 2019, Catania in Sicily was selected to host the IYFR Annual General Meeting for Italy. As a result there were about forty participants from the seven Italian fleets, plus many local mariners from Sicily who joined the numerous activities organized for the occasion. So many Rotarians from many Rotary Districts!

The IYFR Fellowship, in addition to offering the opportunity to share a common passion with other Rotarians, constitutes an extraordinary tool for the promotion at national and international level of harmony, friendship and service. The slogan "making friend by sharing an interest" shows how the Fellowships represent the true essence of Rotary and the principle on which the largest service organization in the world is based and from which it draws its strength.

One key element of Rotary is the concept of 'Service above Self', and this service ideal was pursued at the AGM. Therefore we were happy to include an important project on "Plastic Free Waters" in the AGM proceedings, made more relevant by the presence of 14 Rotary clubs from the Mount Etna area, plus Valerio Cimino, District 2110 Governor, Sicily and Malta.

Sergio Santi, Past International Commodore and coordinator of this international project, explained in detail the problem of plastics in the sea where most of them do not biodegrade in any way. Plastics are just dispersed by nature and can remain present and do damage for hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Often used only once and only for a few minutes, most plastic remains in the sea for over 600 years. Plastic waste is fractured and degrades very slowly into small pieces, eventually reaching a size of a few millimetres. These tiny residues and micro plastics are then ingested by living beings that are the basis of the food chain. Birds, turtles or marine mammals that exchange this garbage for food and so do the fish, the same ones that we then eat, considering them healthy food.

Sergio Santi concluded his presentation by launching a cry of alarm! If this pollution rate continues, it is estimated that by 2050 the weight of plastic in the oceans will be higher than the weight of all the fish on the planet!

Of considerable interest were the contributions of the AGM guests. Professor Agata Matarazzo of the Department of Economics and Business of the University of Catania told us about the "green economy and environmental sustainability". Professor Giuseppe Mancini Professor of Environmental Engineering has focused on the subject of plastic recycling and the possible final production of Clean Energy.

The harmful effects of micro plastics on human health were illustrated by Dr Marcella Coci from "L'Orca del Mare", a research project promoted by the University of Catania. This project aims to increase awareness and respect for the environment. Also present were Professors Giorgio Bellia and Riccardo Reitano, of the relative Scientific Committee, both professors of the Faculty of Physics, Department of Biological Sciences.

Dr. Rossana Interlandi of the Environment Section of the legislative office of the European Parliament told us about the recent regulations approved by the European Union. Great attention is now given at Strasbourg to the subject of plastic pollution of our seas. Measures under consideration include methods for the recovery of plastics by fishermen, and legislation to prevent and protect against the harmful effects of micro plastics.

Their contributions raised some interesting ideas with which to enhance our Plastic Free Waters Project. As a result the AGM was a big success! It certainly highlighted a great desire to extend this worthwhile IYFR

project, and I believe we have managed to stimulate considerable interest, even in those who were not been able to participate in the meeting.

Thanks again to all those who have offered their precious collaboration!

Luigi Falanga
Italy Past Regional Commodore