

NBC-NY - Brooklyn Woman Completes Historic Swim Across New York Harbor in Support of Clean Ocean

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By Brian Thompson
July 23, 2015

A Brooklyn swimmer made the first known swim across the mouth of the New York Harbor Wednesday in support of keeping the waters around New York and New Jersey pollution-free.

Open water swimmer Patricia Sener made the historic 17-mile crossing from Sandy Hook to Atlantic Beach, Long Island in 11 hours, 8 minutes and 35 seconds according to Alan Morrison, a crew member who followed her in a boat.

Morrison said Sener, who is executive director of Coney Island Brighton Beach Open Water Swimmers, passed with 400 yards of spouting whales and described her as “tired, very sore, but in good spirits.”

Sener is the first known person to make the swim across the mouth of the harbor.

She said it was a spur of the moment decision to support the concept of a “Clean Ocean Zone” that the environmental group Clean Ocean Action is trying to get through Congress. If established, the Clean Ocean Zone would make the New York - New Jersey Bight the nation’s first pollution-free ocean area where oil and gas production, new sewage and pollution sources and other harmful industrial uses of the ocean would be locked out, according to COA.

The swimmer said she is especially concerned about plans to build a liquefied natural gas facility off Long Island known as Port Ambrose.

NJ.com - Woman makes ‘unprecedented’ swim from N.J. to N.Y.

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By MaryAnn Spoto | NJ Advance Media for NJ.com
on July 23, 2015

SANDY HOOK — When Patricia Sener started open water swimming 15 years ago, the Brooklyn woman was struck by the absence of marine life in the waterways around New York and New Jersey.

But in recent years as environmental groups have made inroads into improving water quality, Sener, executive director of the Coney Island Brighton Beach Open Water Swimmers, said she’s noticed the return of sea critters.

So when this experienced distance swimmer wanted to make a statement about the importance of clean water, she decided to make it Wednesday by swimming 17 miles in the waters between New York and New Jersey – home to the largest density of marine mammals and sea turtles in the country.

“I feel like I’m in a position that I can do this long swim and try to also bring attention to why it’s important to keep going in that direction,” of improving water quality, Sener said before taking off from Sandy Hook for her longest swim so far. “This is an incredible resource we have. We should be in the forefront of protecting it.”

To make her statement, Sener teamed up with Clean Ocean Action, a coalition of environmental groups pushing for the federal government to protect that area by declaring it a Clean Ocean Zone (COZ).

“Patricia is making a huge splash for the COZ,” said Cindy Zipf, Clean Ocean Action executive director. “She has chartered a new and unprecedented course to raise awareness about the remarkable ocean we share between our shorelines.”

Zipf said the New York Bight is “a rich diversity of marine life,” including sea horses, sharks and humpback whales.

It used to be the site for offshore dumping of sewage sludge until environmental groups, including Clean Ocean Action, found to have that practice stopped. Since then, the sea life has started to return, Zipf said.

Planning this swim for nearly a year, Sener, 51, said she picked Wednesday because that’s when the tides would be most favorable for her. But that’s about all she knew – because until Wednesday, no one had swum the area she traversed in the western New York Bight.

That’s also where Liberty Natural Gas has proposed building a terminal where ships would offload liquefied natural gas 18 miles from Long Island and 28 miles from Long Branch for distribution in New York.

After 11 hours and 3 minutes in the water, Sener reached the shore at Atlantic Beach on Long Island at 10:06 p.m. on Wednesday.

Before her swim, she said she wasn’t so much worried about sharks – which have been spotted in those water – as much as she was about the Portuguese man-o-war, a potentially deadly jellyfish that has become more abundant in the area.

“There’s critters in there for sure. I’m in their backyard,” Sener said. “I just hope I’m not the best-looking thing on their buffet table.”

Although Sener’s done several long distance swims around the world, she said this one was her longest, topping her 15-mile swim in the Hudson River from the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge in Beacon, NY to Bear Mountain in that state. That took her six hours and 13 minutes.

Her adventure took her across the Ambrose Channel, the busiest shipping lanes in the country.

Even with the favorable tides, the swim took longer than Sener’s estimated seven hours. Her nephew, Lukas Wolf, said the winds, blowing at 15 mph for a good portion of the swim, slowed her down. Water temperatures, though, averaged a

comfortable 69 degrees, he said. Occasionally, she'd take breaks in the water to replenish her energy with peanut butter-and-jelly sandwiches, he said.

Her six-member crew aboard a boat and a kayak included her coach Igor Shoukhardin, a pace swimmer and her nephew. They chronicled her journey on a Facebook page she started for the effort.

Patch - Brooklyn Woman Dives Into Sandy Hook Bay for 'Unprecedented' Swim Across New York Bight

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By Simone Wilson (Patch Staff)

July 22, 2015

Late Wednesday morning, Patricia Sener, a 51-year-old swimmer and activist who lives in Brooklyn's Seagate neighborhood, dove into Sandy Hook Bay for what she and her supporters believe will be an "unprecedented" trip across the New York Bight.

Sener will swim 17 miles in total, from the Clean Ocean Action headquarters in Sandy Hook to the shore of Atlantic Beach, Long Island.

"To the best of our knowledge, no one has done this before today," says Alan Morrison, a board member at Sener's organization, Coney Island Brighton Beach Ocean Water Swimmers.

Morrison is communicating with Patch from inside a fishing boat that's trailing Sener as she swims. Later in the day, he'll be swimming alongside her to help her keep pace.

Sener is also currently flanked by a kayaker who feeds her a sports drink every half-hour.

"She's doing great!" Morrison shouts above the wind.

Wednesday's swim across the New York Bight is certainly not record-breaking in length, so the precedent comes down to location.

For decades, the Bight has held a reputation for being dirty, polluted and teeming with boat traffic. "It used to be more of a dumping zone," Morrison says. "But in recent years, it's really become a wildlife sanctuary. Whales and dolphins have returned to the water. It's had a renaissance."

By swimming across the Bight, Sener hopes to both raise awareness for this changing body of water and raise more money for the NGOs Clean Ocean Action and Gotham Whale, so they can keep moving the Bight in the right direction.

In a statement released before she dove in, Sener said she hoped her feat would bring attention to the Clean Ocean Zone Initiative, a push to turn the Bight into the first-ever federally protected Clean Ocean Zone (COZ).

“This COZ would be the nation’s first-ever pollution-free ocean area where pollution sources such as raw sewage and oil/gas industries would be prohibited,” she said.

Sener is expected to shore up at Atlantic Beach between 6 p.m. and 6:30 p.m.