



Caught with our hand in the toothfish pie

THE LAST OCEAN (E)

directed by Peter Young

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Reviewed by James Croot

Is this New Zealand's biggest environmental shame?

While everyone's attention is focused on efforts to halt Japanese whaling in the Southern Ocean, our country has led the way in the exploitation of the abundance of antarctic toothfish (or Chilean sea bass to give them their more restaurant-friendly US name).

But as Christchurch-based nature cameraman-turned-director Peter Young's film points out, this isn't a debate about quotas and fish stock, it's more about the ethics of fishing the world's last pristine ocean.

For decades the Ross Sea has been the perfect untainted laboratory for global scientists to explore and understand aquatic ecosystems.

However, a loophole in the treaty protecting Antarctica has allowed exploratory fishing, led by New



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Zealand, since 1996. That foot in the door has led to rapid expansion, with many of the other Antarctic Treaty signatories clamouring to get their slice of the "toothfish pie", especially with other fishing grounds waning.

Young's *The Last Ocean* argues that it is already beginning to have an effect on the Ross Sea fauna, home to Weddell seals and large proportions of the Earth's Adelie and emperor penguins.

Co-written with Campbell Live

reporter Richard Langston, Young's *Ocean* cleverly mixes natural history footage with a wide range of talking heads (who mostly present the case for stopping Ross Sea fishing) in an effort to shed light on this somewhat murky business.

What initially shocks is not so much what is going on unknown to most Kiwis, but how many people worldwide have no idea about the Ross Sea.

Young is not a Michael Moore or Morgan Spurlock, but an amiable offscreen voice and guide through the waters of maritime management, asking the right questions to elicit answers most audience members will understand.

He delegates most of the narration to Peter Elliot (TV's *Captain's Log*).

The occasional use of slo-mo and Bill Manhire's evocative poetry muddies the waters a little emotionally, but *Ocean* is a fine companion piece to Rupert Murray's 2009 overfishing expose *The End of the Line*.