

Doco finds high-powered forum

Kiwi film-maker hopes work will inspire international delegates to protect Ross Sea

Jamie Morton science
jamie.morton@nzherald.co.nz

Advocates pushing to protect the pristine Ross Sea from commercial fishing hope to drive home their message with a screening of a Kiwi-made documentary for delegates attending an international Antarctic summit this month.

A theatre in Hobart is being booked to show *The Last Ocean*, chronicling the race to stop commercial fishing in the Ross Sea, during a conference of the 25-nation Commission for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources.

Those seeking an end to fishing in the sea – where the toothfish fishery last year had a \$20 million export value to New Zealand companies – see the meeting as a crucial opportunity to preserve the sea's delicate ecology for future generations.

It comes as the New Zealand Government horrified conservation groups – and the descendant of the British polar explorer who discovered the sea – by pulling out of a joint proposal with the United States to create a marine reserve that would have offered greater protection than New Zealand wanted for the Antarctic toothfish.



Scan here for the film trailer

The film's director, Peter Young, was prepared to continue fighting.

"We'll do whatever we can right up to the last minute to convince [the delegates] of the importance of the decision they are about to make," he said. "In short, it's the opportunity to do something very special in the Ross Sea and gift that remarkable corner of the earth to future generations.

"When you strip back the politics, it comes down to one simple thing

– there are so few untouched oceans on this planet and we have to protect them."

Geoff Key of the Antarctic Ocean Alliance, which has helped organise the screening, said the film would bring the issue alive for the delegates.

"It'd be a great bit of inspiration for when they've got to go back into the meeting and argue over the future of the Ross Sea region."

Mr Key meanwhile said reports that Russia was interested in joining a US proposal for a marine reserve was good news.

The US plan, taking in 1.8 million sq km and covering much of the area left open in the New Zealand proposal, could be backed by the Kremlin, the *Moscow Times* reported.

The spokesman for Russia's Federal Fisheries Agency, Alexander Savelyev, said Russia was ready to consider the initiative and take part.

It affected the country's economic interests as Russians fished for a species of cod icefish, but such catches were small and a ban in the area would cause little damage.

Mr Young said a Russia-US partnership would further embarrass New Zealand.

"If there was an agreement, it would mean Russia and the United States have a greater appreciation of the Ross Sea than New Zealand did ... it's kind of shameful."

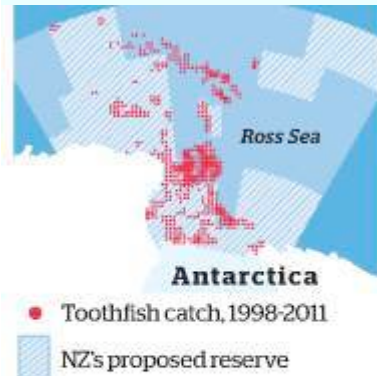
He said it was not too late for New Zealand to reconsider its position.

Foreign Minister Murray McCully said he welcomed the fact that Russia was prepared to engage.

Mr McCully last month confirmed the Government's plan left open areas which had accounted for 84 per cent of the historical toothfish catch, but told Parliament that if a compromise was not found, the Ross Sea could end up with no reserve.

Ross Sea protection zone

- Much of the historical toothfish fishing area falls outside the Government's planned reserve



Antarctic toothfish

Source: Antarctic Ocean Alliance / Herald graphic



Peter Young's documentary on the Ross Sea is to be screened at an Antarctic conservation conference.

Picture / AP (main)



