



Documentaries by FIONA RAE

Beautiful, beautiful Antarctica is on show in **The Last Ocean (Prime, Tuesday, 8.30pm)**, although this is not another nature porn documentary, more of a campaign. The Antarctic Treaty, signed in 1961, has been extraordinarily successful in protecting this untouched environment.

Unfortunately, legislators at the time didn't think about the oceans around Antarctica, and there is now commercial fishing in the Ross Sea. Boats are after the Antarctic toothfish, also known as the Chilean sea bass, a catch so lucrative it is known as white gold.

"I love the fact that half a

century ago nations were wise enough to come to agreement to forestall exploiting the land around Antarctica," says oceanographer Sylvia Earle. "They weren't wise enough to do the same thing for the ocean."

It was New Zealand that started it, too. "We saw that there was pressure for fishing for toothfish," says Stuart Prior, head of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Trade's Antarctic Policy Unit from 1992-99. "And that this was going to happen regardless

of anything that New Zealand did." The first boat in was a New Zealand vessel in 1996, gathering information. It was an attempt to gain as much control over the situation as possible, says Prior.

A commission was set up to protect the waters around Antarctica: the Convention on the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources (CCAMLR). However, the rules allow "rational use" of the resource, and Prior admits there was a "gold-rush mentality" that wasn't handled properly. Within 10 years, 20 boats were in the Ross Sea from more than 12 nations.

Scientists see this as a disaster. Who knows what the consequences of reducing the top predator in the Ross Sea will be? There is still much that is unknown about the toothfish, particularly its numbers. Despite this, it has been decided to reduce the fish's population by 50% over the next 35 years.

