

# Bridging the Gap Between Science and Policy with Film

## *Introducing a New Communications Tool for Climate Scientists*

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### Introduction

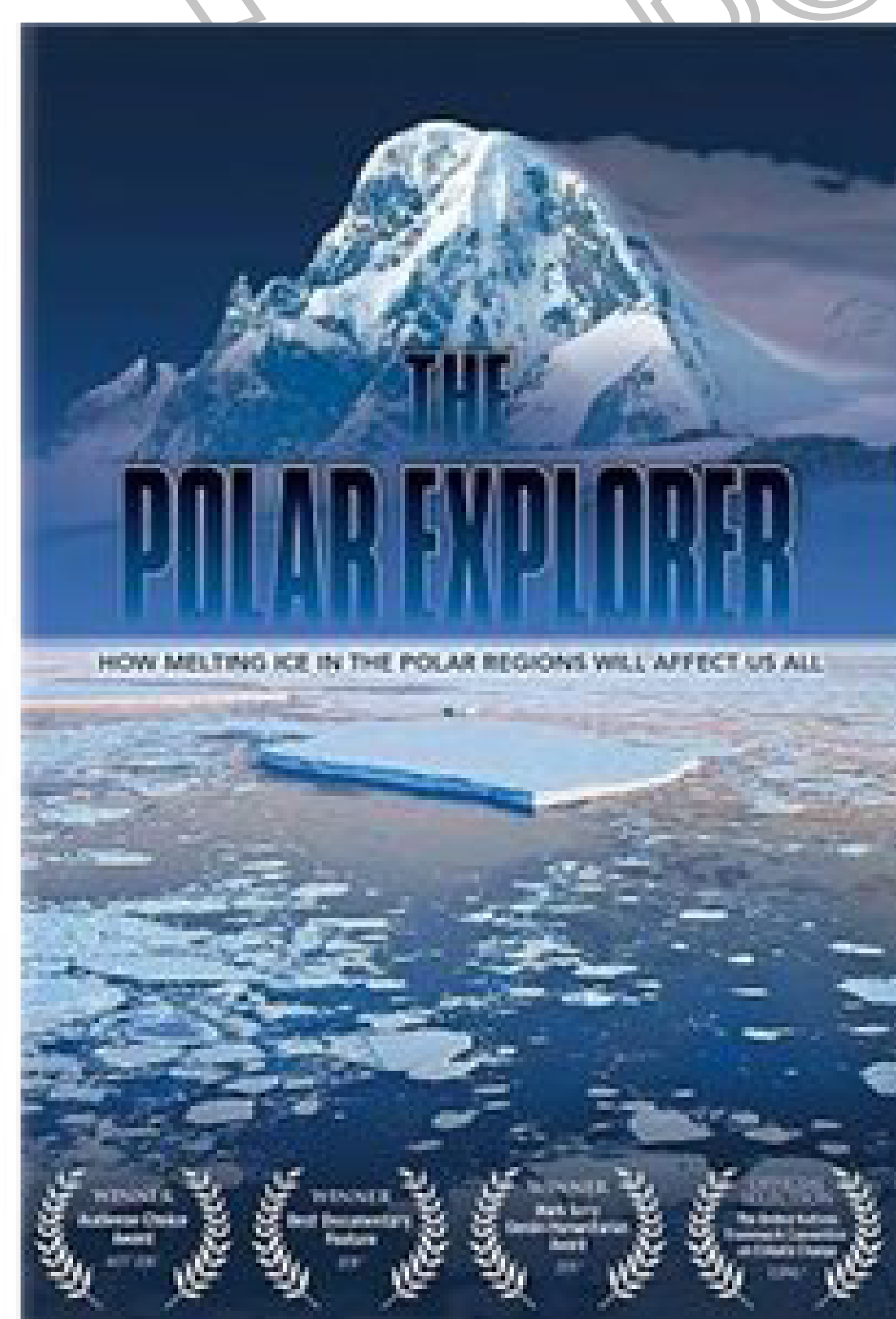
The documentary film has gone through many changes in style, each with its unique agenda in reaching their audiences. In the late 1800s, a Romanian surgeon used film to record operations and results to visually demonstrate techniques and research to his students. The educational success of this method inspired North American filmmakers to use film to portray social issues in the attempt to bring about social change. The journalistic integrity of this approach was compromised as the filmmakers' personal biases dictated the content rendering the film genre suspect.

Since then, the documentary film saw many other uses: a teaching aid for educators; the travelogue, showcasing exotic locations; and popular entertainment.

More recently, scientists have found that supplementing their written reports of their research with documentary films makes their data and conclusions more accessible to a non-scientific audience.

In particular, international policy-makers have proven to prefer receiving their information through film rather than through text as it provides a visual context which aids in the comprehension of material usually difficult to understand by the untrained audience.

Two documentary films, **The Antarctica Challenge** and **The Polar Explorer**, that presented research and discoveries made by international climate scientists in the polar regions (Antarctica and the Arctic), were invited by the United Nations to screen to delegates attending the Framework Conventions on Climate Change in Copenhagen (2009) and Cancun (2010) directly resulting in a new resolution addressing the imminent threat of rising sea levels being adopted.



### Objectives

- To explore the Communications benefits of film to both the scientific community and policy-makers;
- To measure the results of film exhibitions at policy-making conferences;
- To understand how and why the documentary film is a more effective data delivery system;

### Materials & Methods

#### MATERIALS:

**The Antarctica Challenge: A Global Warning** (2009). Documentary Feature. 52 minutes. Directed by Mark Terry

**The Polar Explorer** (2010). Documentary Feature. 52 minutes. Directed by Mark Terry

**Youth Climate Report** (2011 to 2013). Documentary Series. Executive Producers: John Kelly and Mark Terry

#### METHODS:

- Work closely with climate scientists in the field documenting the methods and results of their research without introducing interference that may adversely affect or contaminate their findings.
- Interview the scientists on camera so they can explain the purpose of their research, the challenges (if any) of their methods and their specific findings.
- Film and incorporate B-roll to provide context to the documented research.
- Write and record voice-over in plain language to supplement the scientific jargon used by the interviewed scientists.
- Present the film at the invitation of the United Nations at its annual Framework Conventions on Climate Change.
- Evaluate the film's impact on its audiences by conducting question-and-answer sessions following the screenings, by interviewing the audiences following the Q&A sessions and by attending and participating in follow-up meetings in which delegates and negotiators discuss and draft policy resolutions related to the content of the previously screened film.

### Results

The Antarctica Challenge interviewed climate scientists in the field in Antarctica from Russia, Canada, the UK, the USA and Ukraine.

The Antarctica Challenge was invited to screen to delegates attending COP15 in Copenhagen screening to approximately 2,000 delegates at 25 screenings over a two-week period in December, 2009.

The Polar Explorer interviewed climate scientists in the field in the Arctic and Antarctica from Norway, Belgium, France, Canada, the UK and the USA.

The Polar Explorer was invited to screen to delegates attending COP16 in Cancun screening to approximately 1,500 delegates at 25 screenings over a two week period in December, 2010

As a result of the screenings at both conferences, the first resolution addressing the imminent threat of rising sea levels caused by glacier retreat was adopted: **Enhanced Action on Adaptation: Section II, Subsection 25.**

### Conclusions

With unbiased reporting of the climate scientists in the field, policy-makers appreciated the more easily-accessible data delivery system provided by the documentary films. As a result of this success a permanent partnership has been established with the United Nations and Neko Harbour Entertainment, Inc (the films' production company) to produce annual documentaries showcasing the latest climate research worldwide in a series called **Youth Climate Report**.

### References

Karline, Beth and Johnson, John. **Measuring Impact: The Importance of Evaluation for Documentary Film Campaigns**, by Beth Karlin, John Johnson. Published by Media Culture Journal, Queensland University of Technology, Australia. Vol. 14, No. 6 (2011).

