



MAKING WAVES

SURFER SEEKS TO CHANGE THE TIDE FOR OCEAN WILDLIFE

Professional surfer Dave Rastovich has spent his fair share of time drifting atop a surfboard, waiting for the perfect wave. But it's not just the rush of slicing through a curl that gets his blood pumping. It's the quiet intervals between waves that bring some of life's most unforgettable moments, like when a whale suddenly breaks through the water's surface and then slips silently beneath his board. Or when he's riding a wave and there beside him, inside the rolling wall of foam, is a dolphin surfing.

Such encounters led Rastovich to develop a deep appreciation for the ocean's animals and concern for their fate. In 2004, he and artist Howie Cooke founded Surfers for

Cetaceans, an Australian-based nonprofit that mobilizes surfers and others in the fight against whaling, water pollution, commercial fishing, the capture of marine mammals for theme parks, and other threats.

Just two days after the organization's website went live, Rastovich says, a dol-

phin saved his life by pushing a charging tiger shark away from him. "It was a great response to me finally taking steps to do something for cetaceans."

Now available on DVD, the award-winning documentary *Minds in the Water* follows

Rastovich's international quest to protect marine mammals—from Taiji, Japan, where he protests the annual dolphin drive hunt, to Australia's eastern seaboard, where he draws attention to the plight of humpback whales.

Humane Society International campaign manager Iris Ho also appears in the film, discussing her efforts to stop shark finning, yet another ocean crisis Rastovich has his sights on. To Ho, Rastovich and ocean wildlife advocacy are a perfect fit. "Surfers are some of the most charismatic people," she says, "and people are drawn to their passion."

In this edited interview with staff writer Ruthanne Johnson, Rastovich describes his journey from carefree wave rider to hard-driving advocate.

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Byron Bay, where you live, was once a major whaling station that closed due to overexploitation of the eastern Australian humpback. Is there a lesson here for other coastal regions?

The European story of this area is fraught with destruction of habitat and various native animals. The biodiversity of our region is now celebrated, protected, and promoted as a rich experience for travelers to Australia. Any coastal town in the world that still has some remaining native species would do well to protect those creatures and promote them as a hook to bring visitors to the area.

Why was it important to you to bear witness to the notorious dolphin drive hunts in Taiji, Japan, where each year hundreds of dolphins are herded into shallow waters and butchered, while others are captured for sale to marine parks?

I felt a deep drive to bring a peaceful energy to that bay in the form of a surfer's circle, which is what our culture creates for a surfer who has left his body. Dolphins are surfers and I wanted to honor them yet highlight the brutal reality of what happens in the cove. Japan is a very ritualistic culture, and so I figured if we performed a simple ceremony like this they would understand our motives.

Are the protests and negative publicity about the hunts having an impact?

There have been some changes, though the kills still happen. There are Sea Shepherd volunteers at the cove documenting what is happening and keeping the dolphin killers on tiptoes. The school lunch program of feeding cetacean meat to kids has been scrapped. But the capture of cetaceans and subsequent selling and torturous training of these animals still occur.

The film also documents the six-week TransparentSea Voyage in 2009, when



World-famous wave rider Dave Rastovich—shown here with a sea lion on a Galapagos beach—is on a personal mission to protect the animals who share the surf with him.

ON THE iPad:
Watch the *Minds in the Water* trailer.

you and other advocates sailed, surfed, and kayaked on trimarans from Byron Bay to Bondi Beach in Sydney. What sparked the idea and what was the purpose?

The original idea was applied here in Australia to inspire the government to keep the Japanese whaling fleet out of southern waters. And we were also cleaning beaches and cataloging the rubbish we picked up so we could show local councils and groups tangible numerical illustrations of what trash is on the shoreline.

In *Minds in the Water*, your friend Howie Cooke talks about how surfers strike a silent bargain for the gift of riding waves. What does this mean to you?

In the lead-up to holding a peaceful protest in Taiji Bay, I found myself surrounded by dolphins every time I surfed. At one stage, I was greeted by a baby humpback whale out behind the waves. It swam so close to me that it reached out its pectoral fin above the water and we touched, hand to hand. Whales and dolphins have the skeletal struc-

ture of hands inside their fins, so it was kind of like an interspecies high five.

When a coastal species suffers, surfers are there to bear witness. We are the people who should be guarding our coasts and everything there. We are the canaries in the coal mine. When the ocean is sick, we get sick. At this stage, the industry and community are responding greatly by supporting our efforts. I think we are only going to see surfers getting more and more active in defending the surf that we can't live without.

How are people responding to the documentary?

So far, the response has been great. I have met a fair few young kids who have seen the film and reacted with inspiration and a desire to be engaged with issues that fire them up. That is the best possible result for the film, I think. If it inspires just one surfing grommet out there to be active in preserving the places we love and the animals who share waves with us, then I am happy the film was made.

➤ **FOR MORE** about the film or to order the DVD, visit mindsinthewater.com.

