

ELANTI MEDIA and POLARELLA FILMS in association with RNZ presents

MIGHTY INDEED



Directed by Vanessa Wells
Produced by Vanessa Wells and Polly Fryer

87 mins · General Audience · NZ

Language - English (closed captions, audio description available)

Country of Production - New Zealand

Locations - Antarctica / New Zealand

Press Contacts:

NZ (home territory) - Great Scott PR
Hannah Powell | hannah@greatscott.co.nz

TAGLINE

Three women. Four decades. One melting continent.

LOGLINE

Three remarkable women, spanning four decades, push the boundaries of what we know about Antarctica's frozen ocean.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS

In one of the harshest places on Earth, three women from different generations chase a hidden and ephemeral world beneath the Antarctic sea ice. Weaving their personal stories with groundbreaking science, this is an intimate human portrait set against the immense scale of Antarctica, told with grit, wit, and surprising warmth.

SHORT SYNOPSIS

In one of the harshest places on Earth, three women from different generations chase a hidden and ephemeral world beneath the Antarctic sea ice. Dr Natalie Robinson leads an expedition to McMurdo Sound, joined by PhD student and microbiologist Jacqui Stuart on her first trip south. Mentoring them from afar is veteran sea ice physicist Professor Pat Langhorne.

Battling brutal weather and isolation, the team discovers extraordinary tiny creatures within the delicate structures of the ice. Weaving personal stories with groundbreaking science, this is an intimate and deeply human portrait of life set against the immense scale of Antarctica, told with grit, wit, and surprising warmth.

LONG SYNOPSIS

In one of the harshest environments on Earth, three women from different generations chase a hidden and ephemeral world beneath the Antarctic sea ice.

Antarctic oceanographer Dr Natalie Robinson leads a team of ten scientists on an expedition to McMurdo Sound. PhD student and self-confessed microalgae nerd Jacqui Stuart embarks on her first trip south, while Emeritus Professor Patricia Langhorne, a veteran sea ice physicist with over 25 polar deployments, mentors them both from New Zealand.

Camped on the sea ice for five weeks, Natalie, Jacqui, and the team face brutal weather, gear failures, relentless winds and snowdrifts, as well as physical exhaustion. In temperatures that push people and equipment to their limits, the team discovers extraordinary tiny creatures within the delicate layers of the platelet ice, under the sea ice that protects it.

Surrounded by jaw-dropping icescapes with seals, penguins, and otherworldly underwater life, the team not only survives but thrives. In some ways, life here feels simpler than back home.

Weaving Natalie and Jacqui's present-day expedition with Pat's rich archival footage, the film reveals the deeply personal stories behind the science. It also raises questions about what it takes for scientific discoveries to inform meaningful social change.

This is an intimate and inspiring portrait of life on the frontlines of climate change, set against the vast, untamed wilderness of Antarctica — told with grit, wit, and ironically, a whole lot of warmth.

AWARDS

Winner - DocEdge Best NZ Film

Winner - Best NZ Director

Eligible for the 2026 Academy Awards (Oscars)

DOC EDGE JURY COMMENTS

“The currency of the subject matter, as well as complexity of the circumstances in which this film was made, are addressed in technically accomplished and narratively compelling ways. The film is well-shot, even in physical situations that many others might have deemed impossible, and the participants were thoughtfully and effectively utilized. This film tackles issues from the planetary to the personal with a deft touch, showcasing in equal measure the struggles of science and those who practice it, keeping us engaged with its timely message and its tenacious participants. In an era where hope is hard to find, the filmmakers balance existential urgency with the optimism that keeps people going in the darkest of times. Made with exemplary craft in every department, this film distinguished itself to the entire jury in a unanimous decision.”

“Documentaries showcasing issues of global import are common, but finding one this well-conceived and crafted is a gift. This director uncovers the hidden depths in intriguing characters and inhospitable environments alike, leading an exemplary team in crafting a patient but powerful narrative that seamlessly balances the smallest of lifeforms with the fate of the world. This film rewards the head and the heart, and shows a clear directorial vision, gracefully executed.”

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

When I first visited Antarctica in 2018, the scientists I met and the continent itself had a profound effect on me—it moved me to my core. I have never felt more connected to our planet than I did in Antarctica.

While I was there, science became visceral and real. When we discussed sea ice melting with Dr Natalie Robinson, we stood on 2-meter-thick sea ice. When we talked about the impacts of climate change on “charismatic megafauna,” we looked into the eyes of an Emperor Penguin. The climate crisis became tangible.

On returning from Antarctica, I was personally compelled to act—and I did. I reduced my family and business's carbon footprint dramatically with relatively small changes.

From an artistic perspective as a filmmaker, I am fascinated by what drives others in extreme environments. I'm intrigued by human/non-human interactions and drawn to those who challenge preconceptions of what a scientist or explorer should be.

I believe the screen's ability to change people's perceptions at an emotional level is the most powerful tool I have to help others understand the climate crisis. Ultimately, I want to shift how we view the world. The more we connect with our wild places through the hearts and minds of those we can relate to, the more inclined we will be to change our current trajectory.

As Dame Jacinda Ardern says in the film, “If minds change, behaviour follows.”

Bios of Key Cast:

Professor Emerita Pat Langhorne is one of New Zealand's most respected Antarctic scientists and a world authority on sea ice. Originally from Scotland, she gained her PhD at the Scott Polar Research Institute, Cambridge, before moving to the University of Otago in 1988. Over the course of her career she has led or taken part in more than 25 research expeditions to Antarctica, investigating how sea ice forms, fractures, and interacts with the changing climate.

Pat's pioneering work has shaped global understanding of the Ross Sea region, and she has been a key figure in national and international collaborations, including the Deep South National Science Challenge. In recognition of her outstanding contribution to Antarctic science, she was awarded the New Zealand Antarctic Medal in 2019. Now an Emerita Professor at Otago, she continues to advise and inspire the next generation of polar scientists.

Dr Natalie Robinson is the Director of New Zealand's Antarctic Science Platform, and a marine physicist based at Earth Sciences NZ (previously known as NIWA). Her work specialises in polar oceanography, exploring how ice shelves and sea ice interact—particularly through phenomena like “platelet ice,” ice-ocean supercooling, roughness at the ice-ocean interface, and buoyancy-driven convection. Natalie earned a PhD from the University of Otago under the supervision of Prof. Pat Langhorne, and has led multiple field campaigns in McMurdo Sound, Antarctica. She has received Marsden grants (2015, 2023) for her leading research, and is committed to both scientific rigour and making her findings accessible to broader audiences via outreach and public communication.

Dr Jacqui Stuart is a marine biologist and ecologist affiliated with the Antarctic Research Centre at Victoria University of Wellington (and previously Cawthron Institute), whose pioneering PhD work focuses on microalgae in Antarctica. Her research examines the diversity, ecology, and molecular responses of microalgal communities in and beneath sea ice, and how changes in climate stressors—light, sea ice depth, and environmental nutrients—may alter these foundational ecosystems. In 2021 she was awarded the Sir Robin Irvine Doctoral Scholarship by Antarctica New Zealand to support her Antarctic research. Jacqui also contributes enthusiastically to science communication, field expeditions, and is driven by her passion for the microscopic world that underpins Antarctic marine ecosystems.

Bios of Key Crew:

Producer - Polly Fryer

Polly Fryer is a British-born, New Zealand-based producer acclaimed for her work across documentary and scripted storytelling.

In 2025 she produced, true-crime docuseries *Polk: The Trial of Philip Polkinghorne*, a 3 part series for Warner Bros, Nine and Sky UK released to critical acclaim. The series is represented worldwide by Submarine Entertainment. Also in the same year feature documentary *Mighty Indeed* won best Film and best Director at the Oscar qualifying Doc Edge festival. In 2024, she produced the feature film *We Were Dangerous* which won the SXSW Special Jury Award, imagineNATIVE Best Dramatic feature, Best Women Film Series at San Diego International Film Festival, Best Youth Film at SCHLINGEL, Best Narrative Feature at Kerry, and the Pasifika Award in Hawaii. It also screened at eight major festivals, including NZIFF, Sydney, and Chicago. It's currently in theatres across the US. She's in post production on Andrew Niccol's feature film *I, Object*, a high end indie film for a family audience starring Anna Farris and Karl Urban. It's presold to 15 territories.

Other notable work includes animated series *Badjelly*, based on Spike Milligan's classic children's book, featuring a star-studded voice cast including Miriam Margolyes and Rhys Darby. It's premiered on TVNZ in 2025 and has been brought by ITV for the UK. She was Supervising Producer on Season

2 of the dystopian dark comedy series *Creamerie* (2023), which aired on TVNZ and Hulu. She produced the Netflix Original *Dark Tourist* (2018) and *The Day That Changed My Life* (2015), which won Best New Zealand Feature at the Documentary Edge Festival. Earlier in her career, she produced the Emmy-nominated docudrama *The Golden Hour* (2012).

Polly worked at Netflix in Los Angeles for two years as a Production and Post Executive, contributing to global non-fiction content. She also served as Joint Head of Te Puna Kairangi, the Premium Productions for International Audiences Fund at the NZFC, supporting high-quality New Zealand stories for global audiences.

Producer / Director - Vanessa Wells

Vanessa Wells is an award-winning director, producer, and theatre practitioner who has worked in the arts for more than two decades. Her most recent feature documentary, *Mighty Indeed* (2025), follows three remarkable women scientists and their work in Antarctica. The film premiered at Doc Edge Film Festival, where it won Best NZ Film and Best NZ Director, and is now embarking on its international festival run.

Vanessa has travelled to Antarctica three times, building a significant body of work that spans education, documentary, and children's media. Her Antarctic projects include an educational play that toured primary schools, content for *Sesame Street* (which has since commissioned eight short films from her company, Elanti Media), and the short documentary *Te Whakairo* (2019), which screened internationally at festivals including Show Me Shorts, FIFO Tahiti, and The Explorers Club Polar Film Festival in New York.

Her debut feature, *East to East* (2018), about teenagers taking on New Zealand's iconic Coast to Coast multi-sport event, was critically acclaimed after its sold-out premiere season at NZIFF and international festival screenings. An educational version of the film with tailored resources was also developed, extending its reach to schools and young audiences.

She has also collaborated on innovative interactive projects such as *Give Kate a Voice* (2018, co-director) and *Living Flowerwall* (2019, producer/director of film content). Other directing work includes the digital documentary series *Braveheart Christchurch* (2018-20), which reached hundreds of thousands of viewers online.

Vanessa takes a collaborative, cross-disciplinary approach to filmmaking, often working at the intersection of science, art, and community. In addition to her creative work, she is a long-standing advocate for women in screen, serving on the board of WIFT NZ 2015-25.

Director of Photography - Adam Jones

Adam Jones began his career in broadcast journalism, spending five years with TV3 - three in Auckland and two in Dunedin - working across both the six o'clock *News* and *Campbell Live*. Since then, he has built a diverse career behind the camera, combining his storytelling skills with a deep love of the ocean and the natural world.

With a background in marine work of all kinds, Adam has travelled to Antarctica three times, including sailing through the Drake Passage to the West Antarctic Peninsula. During that voyage, he and his crew were left completely alone after other scientists and research stations withdrew due to the Covid

pandemic. Footage from that expedition featured in the US/NZ series *Dynamic Planet*. Further international work includes filming for *Big Pacific* with NHNZ (5x1hrs) for PBS/CCTV9/Arte.

Adam's New Zealand screen credits include Series Creator and Director of Photography for the series *Honey Wars* (a Greenstone production for Prime TV exploring the Northland honey industry), as well as working on RNZ's *Barbershop* by Tai Huri Films and the acclaimed TVNZ Platinum series *Our Big Blue Backyard*, where he filmed on both Te Hauturu o Toi and Aotea/Great Barrier Island. Beyond film and blue chip television, Adam's work includes sports and sailing events; he's filmed three *Olympic Games* and the 37th *America's Cup* in Barcelona (2024). He lives in the Bay of Islands with his wife and two children.

Editor - Emma Smart

Emma Smart graduated from the New Zealand Broadcast School with a diploma in Digital Video Post Production in 2007. From there she started filming and photographing weddings, and now runs her own business, Emma Smart Creative. As well as freelance commercial photography and video, she also does commercial voiceover work.

Most recently, Emma edited two feature documentaries, "*project fiftyone*" which followed the humanitarian work of a young Kiwi-Afghan couple after the 2019 Christchurch mosque attacks, and *Mighty Indeed*, a documentary following three female scientists who work in the climate space in Antarctica, which won the Best NZ Feature award at Doc Edge Festival 2025. She has also worked on short films for *Sesame Street Workshop*, *Te Whakairo*, a short documentary that was selected for Show Me Shorts, and *Homecoming*, a short film about a transgender woman facing the anxieties of coming home and coming out.

Writer/Researcher - Rebecca Priestley

Rebecca Priestley is a writer, academic, and science historian with degrees in earth sciences, the history and philosophy of science, and creative writing. Her academic and creative work has a focus on climate change, sea level rise, and Antarctica. Rebecca has visited Antarctica three times – in 2011, 2014, and 2018 – on media and community engagement programmes.

Rebecca was recipient of the Prime Minister's Science Communication Prize 2016, winner of the Royal Society of New Zealand Science Book Prize 2009, and a member of the Melting Ice, Rising Seas team who won the Prime Minister's Science Prize 2019.

Her most recent books are *Fifteen Million Years in Antarctica* and *End Times* (VUP 2019, 2023).

Composer - Brooke Singer

Brooke Singer is a composer, musician and university educator based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington. For over a decade she has fronted the ethereal dream pop band *French for Rabbits*. Her songwriting project and band has toured several times internationally in Europe and the USA, garnered over 20 million streams, and been nominated for the Aotearoa Music Awards, Taite Prize and Silver Scrolls. She also performs in the *Anthonie Tonnon* band and co-writes with other artists (most recently on *Kaylee Bell's* award nominated '*Cowboy Up*'). She freelances as a record engineer

and producer (including on the *Charlotte Yates*, *Michaela Tempers*, and *Martin Sagadin* records out this year), and co-runs the DIY record label *Home Alone*.

Brooke is signed to Concord Publishing and has had her music appear on various local and international TV shows. In 2025 she composed her first film score with Elliot Vaughan for NZ documentary *Mighty Indeed*, and is currently working on her second film project.

Composer - Elliot Vaughan

Elliot Vaughan is a composer, performer, and artist based in Te Whanganui-a-Tara Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand. His output includes exploratory concert music, composed theatre, pop songs, performance art, and contributions to collaborative projects. He was the 2024 CNZ/NZSM Composer-in-Residence.

For fifteen years he lived in Vancouver, where he completed a BFA at SFU School for the Contemporary Arts and made his living freelancing. His career there extended from arrangements for theatre and pop records to music for dance and contemporary classical composition.

Returning to Aotearoa New Zealand in 2018 to earn his MMus at Te Kōkī—New Zealand School of Music, Elliot has established himself as a key voice in exploratory composition and performance there. His blurring of performance art and music has been recognised with awards and commissions, including for his shows *First Buzzard at the Body* (2021) and *Fish in Pink Gelatine* (2019).

Elliot has a pop band called *Eigenface* and a string quartet called the *Moth Quartet*.

About the Production Company - Elanti Media

Established in 2016, Elanti Media is a boutique media production house based in Aotearoa New Zealand. The company creates film, television, and interactive content with a strong focus on social change. Its work explores the human condition, often through adventurous or resilient characters and relationships, with the goal of contributing to a better world.

Elanti Media is a Foundation Member of the Christchurch Antarctic Network. It is committed to operating sustainably and is proud to be a carbon-neutral business.

Key Credits

Featuring	PROF PAT LANGHORNE DR NATALIE ROBINSON JACQUI STUART
Producer / Director Producer Executive Producers	VANESSA WELLS POLLY FRYER JILL MACNAB & PHIL BREMNER
Editor Writer / Researcher Online Editor Editorial Consultant	EMMA SMART REBECCA PRIESTLEY RICHARD LORD MAYA DAISY HAWKE
Director of Photography Additional Cinematography	ADAM JONES OLLIE DAMM-LOGAN LEIGH TAIT RICHARD LORD JESS CHARLTON VANESSA WELLS
Drone Operators	ANTHONY POWELL ADAM JONES
Sound Designer Sound Recordists	CHRIS SINCLAIR CHRIS CUBITT CHRIS HILES TONY SPEAR LUIS RODRIGUEZ
Composers	BROOKE SINGER ELLIOT VAUGHAN
Animation	NED WENLOCK JACQUI STUART