

'Secret Life of Pearls'

Paspaley has worked with National Geographic Channel to create a documentary that provides a rare insight into the fascinating world of the Australian pearling industry

The *Secret Life of Pearls*, an hour-long documentary created by Paspaley, is premiering globally on the *National Geographic Channel* throughout 2016. Michael Bracher, executive director of Paspaley Pearling Company, explains why the story of the Australian South Sea pearl – one of the world's rarest and most valuable gems – needs to be told.

JNA: What compelled Paspaley to support this project – *Secret Life of Pearls* – with the *National Geographic Channel*? What's your main objective?

Michael Bracher: *Secret Life of Pearls* delves into the mysterious and exciting world of Australia's South Sea pearling industry. The one-hour documentary followed Paspaley's pearling operations during the 2015 season and was largely shot on location in the Kimberley, north-west Australia.

The partnership with *National Geographic* reflects the shared commitment to deliver international television viewers a rare insight into the extraordinary and undiscovered world of the Australian pearling industry and pearling process that includes diving for wild pearl oysters, operations, husbandry and harvest. The programme provides an insight into one of Australia's most important luxury export industries.

The primary objective of this initiative was to bring awareness to end-consumers about the extraordinary industry and gem that continues to come from Australia's waters. The Australian industry is approximately 150 years old and for a variety of reasons is unique in the world of pearls. We continue to catch wild pearl oysters whereas the international pearling industry predominantly relies on hatchery-reared oysters. The Australian output is regulated by government quotas, which results in comparatively stable production when compared to other pearl types. Our process results in a cultured pearl that can be sold with its natural colour and lustre, which is a highly desirable characteristic for discerning end-consumers. The programme also touches on the environmental and social responsibility of the Australian pearling industry. Such issues have become buzz words in recent years but in some cases there are large gaps between the broad claims of industry and the actual operations. We believe that the more end-consumers know about the Australian pearling industry, the more they will appreciate the Australian pearl. The ultimate objective, of course, is to increase demand for Australian South Sea pearls, which will improve business for the wholesale and retail companies promoting our pearls.

This project compliments other initiatives directed at the wholesale and retail trade such as the development of an unbranded educational website (Australiansouthseapearls.com), marketing collateral to promote and educate global clients about the Australian pearling category, industry-level representation at trade shows, and most recently the commission of an international research project focused on the US and China that will



inform the development of an international marketing campaign to promote Australian pearls over the next five to 10 years.

The *Secret Life of Pearls* is set to air on *National Geographic* in 46 countries throughout 2016, ensuring our key messages are delivered to a broad audience on a global scale.

JNA: In a nutshell, what is the documentary's focus? Could you give us at least a couple of highlights?

Bracher: The *Secret Life of Pearls* showcases the adventure and beauty of Australia's north-west and the romance, excitement and challenges

behind producing one of the world's rarest and most beautiful gems. It is a story of remarkable collaboration between man and nature in one of the most remote and dramatic landscapes on Earth. Australia is the only country in the world that still largely relies on the use of wild-caught pearl oysters for the production of its cultured pearls. It is a hostile and unpredictable environment. Divers searching for wild pearl oysters, 20 miles off the most remote coast in Australia, face hazards including deadly jellyfish and tiger sharks. Factors such as extreme heat, torrential rain and cyclones make for a challenging work environment.

It is a huge effort in order to produce the world's most valuable pearl and one that can be offered with its natural colour and lustre.

JNA: How long did it take Paspaley and the *National Geographic* to finish the documentary? Had it been a challenging experience?

Bracher: The *Secret Life of Pearls* project spanned five years from concept to delivery. Every element of the film was intensively planned, ensuring that each stage of the pearling process was captured at the correct moment, as well as some of the remarkable environmental elements, which only occur during specific periods annually.

Filming and editing spanned 18 months, ensuring that the documentary was ready for early 2016 for *National Geographic* internationally.

The greatest challenge experienced in the creation of this documentary was in working with nature. Always unpredictable, we worked to ensure there was little surprise and a contingency plan if needed. We were fortunate to capture some elements in filming including the humpback whales, horizontal waterfalls and extreme sea life.

The Secret Life of Pearls will premiere on April 28 in the US on the *National Geographic Channel*. Hong Kong is set to premiere in May, with other countries to follow. View the official trailer at natgeotv.com.au/tv/secret-life-of-pearls. **JNA**



Snapshots from the documentary, *Secret Life of Pearls*

