

Sea of Shadows - premieres 6 December on National Geographic

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The fight to save the world's most endangered whale from vicious drug cartels, enviro-thriller *Sea of Shadows* premieres on National Geographic 6 December 2019 at 21:00.

“It required great courage to make this film: Richard Ladkani and Andrea Crosta, both good friends of mine, risked their lives tracking down and investigating both the Chinese and Mexican cartels involved. We must try to save the vaquita, because every species matters. I hope this film can inspire real action, before it is too late.”

—Jane Goodall

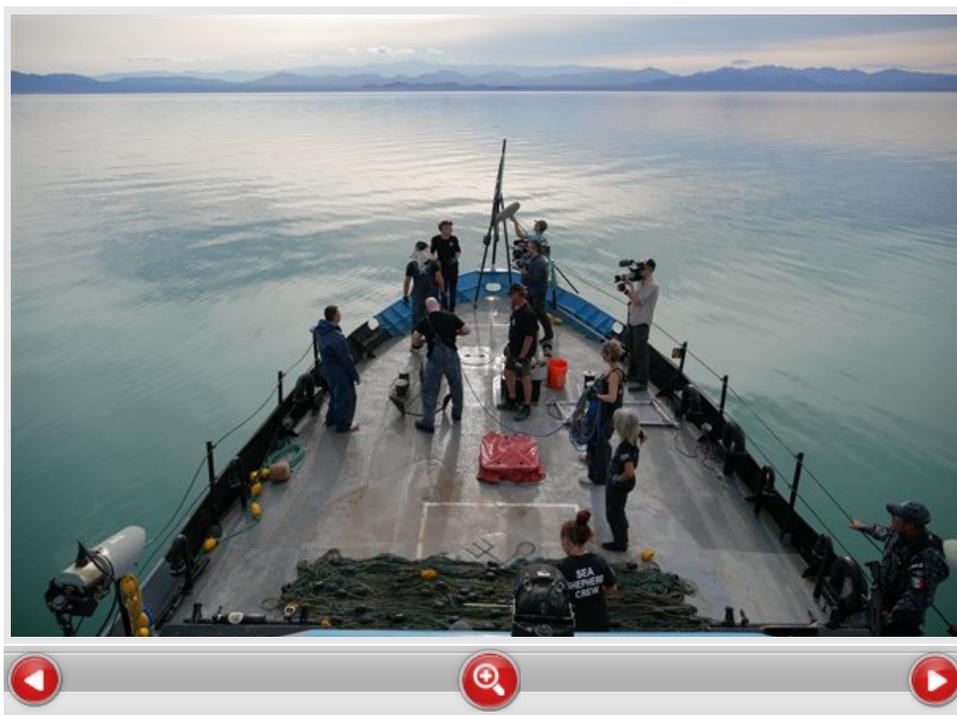
Described by the Los Angeles Times as a “chilling real-life criminal thriller” and a “purposeful, impressive work,” the Sundance audience award winning **SEA OF SHADOWS** makes its broadcast debut in **South Africa** on **6 December at 21:00 CAT** when it premieres, commercial free, on National Geographic (DSTV 181), and will air globally in 172 countries and 43 languages. From director Richard Ladkani and Terra Mater Factual Studios in association with Malaika Pictures and Leonardo DiCaprio’s Appian Way, the film focuses on a looming disaster in one of the most spectacular environments on Earth with the intensity of a Hollywood thriller, as a rescue mission unlike any other comes together to combat the extinction of a species.

In the Sea of Cortez, a war is being waged by Mexican drug cartels and Chinese traffickers. A native species of fish, the totoaba, is being poached at an alarming rate because of a superstitious belief among some in China that their bladders — which cost more per ounce than gold — possess miraculous healing powers. Nicknamed the “cocaine of the sea,” these extremely rare fish have triggered a multimillion-dollar black market that threatens not only their existence, but virtually all marine life in the region — including the endangered whale known as the vaquita.

Set on the troubled streets of the fishing town of San Felipe, in the gleaming metropolis of Mexico City and the deceptively placid waters off the Baja Peninsula, the intense docu-thriller **SEA OF SHADOWS** goes inside the fight for survival as a team of brilliant scientists, high-tech conservationists, investigative journalists and undercover agents put their lives on the line, to save the last remaining vaquita and bring the vicious international crime syndicate to justice, including:

- Jack Hutton, a 21-year-old master drone pilot on board a Sea Shepherd patrol ship, spends his nights searching for illegal fishermen hauling deadly gillnets into fishing boats. After being spotted, the poachers ditch their illegal cargo and flee the area. The frantic, high-speed boat chases that sometimes result in dangerous collisions, form several heart-stopping encounters in the film.
- Courageous undercover agents led by Earth League International's co-founder Andrea Crosta investigate the illicit contraband at the centre of this escalating war. Tracking the illicit swim bladders of the totoaba fish through the black-market chains of Mexican traffickers, they ultimately expose the true enablers of the totoaba cartel, the Chinese mafia of Tijuana.
- An international team of scientists, in conjunction with the Mexican government, launch the Vaquita CPR (Conservation Protection and Rescue) mission, led by marine veterinarian Dr. Cynthia Smith and Dr. Lorenzo Rojas-Bracho, designed to capture and temporarily resettle the last surviving vaquitas, to protect them from the killings fields of the Sea of Cortez.
- Investigative journalist Carlos Loret de Mola works perilously to expose a Mexican drug lord who has become the "El Chapo" of totoaba poachers through his own independent investigation. His findings lead him into a world of corruption at the highest levels of the Mexican government.
- Alan and his grandfather Javier Valverde belong to one of the oldest fishing families in San Felipe. They courageously resist the drug cartel's pressure to fish for the illegal totoaba but are ultimately forced to flee the area for their own safety.

"The response to the film from audiences around the world at festivals and screenings has been amazing, and I am so thrilled that it will be airing globally on National Geographic and exposing new viewers to the plight of the vaquita and the shadowy factions that are destroying all marine life in the Sea of Cortez," said director Richard Ladkani. "My goal as a director is to try to have a lasting impact on our world by focusing on issues that threaten our natural environment, and I hope the film shows viewers how incredibly urgent and symbolic this issue is, but also imparts a sense of hope, that this precious ecosystem can be saved from total collapse. Our planet is under attack, but I believe each one of us has the ability to become part of the solution."



Since premiering at Sundance earlier this year, **SEA OF SHADOWS** has had theatrical releases in the US, Mexico, the UK and Austria. The film has also screened at festivals around the world such as Hong Kong International Film Festival, DOC

NYC and CPH:DOX, and has garnered recognition with its inclusion on The Hollywood Reporter's sixth annual 'Docs to Watch' list. In addition to its Sundance audience award, the film has also been honoured with Best Theatrical Film at the Jackson Wild Media Awards, Best Documentary at the Lighthouse International Film Festival, Audience Choice Award at Cinéfest Sudbury in Canada and the Minnesota Cinematic Arts Award at the Minneapolis St. Paul International Film Festival.

SEA OF SHADOWS is also having an impact on policy makers and influencers. The film has brought together a powerful coalition of scientists, investigators, activists, politicians and non-profits working together to save the elusive vaquita and to help highlight the plight of endangered species across the globe. Screenings have taken place for the Mexican Senate, the US Department of State, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the United Nations' Headquarters in New York, Geneva and Vienna as well as various international law enforcement agencies and non-government conservation organisations.

"**Sea of Shadows** highlights a complex world of wildlife crime, which deserves our awareness and urgent attention, as any loss of an endangered species has a tremendous effects on our global ecosystem. I'm sure that audiences across Africa will be astounded by the tremendous courage that the teams in this film demonstrate in their quest to save the vaquita and ensure that justice prevails. I hope that they will also feel encouraged that we can all make a difference in one way or another" said Evert Van der Veer, for Media Networks, the Walt Disney Company Africa.

Since launching three years ago, National Geographic Documentary Films has come to be known for excellence in nonfiction storytelling, releasing acclaimed films such as the Academy Award®, BAFTA Film Award and Emmy Award-winning **Free Solo**, TIFF audience award winner and fellow THR Docs to Watch nominee **The Cave**, Sundance and SXSW Audience Award-winning **Science Fair**, Emmy award-winning **LA 92** and **Jane** (both LA 92 and Jane were included in the top 15 documentaries considered for an Oscar® in 2017), and Dupont Award-winning **Hell on Earth**.

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