

SALT WATER PEOPLE



From the National Film Board of Canada

Once the rivers and oceans of Canada's Pacific West Coast were teeming with life and the beaches offered up food in abundance. Now this fragile ecosystem is threatened by pollution, logging and the endless demands of a consumer society. In **Salt Water People**, the aboriginal tribes of the West Coast bear witness to the destruction and describe the battle they wage to protect their land and rights.

Filmed deep within the ocean and along the spectacular mountain coastline of British Columbia, **Salt Water People** follows the cycle of the seasons as it examines the past, present and future of the West Coast fisheries and the Native tribes who depend on them for survival. By giving voice to the values and traditions of the West Coast First Nations people, the film asks viewers to examine their own attitudes toward the natural world and the exploitation of its resources.

Director: **Maurice Bulbulian**
Producer: **Jacques Vallée**

121 minutes 30 seconds
Order number: C 9192 083



SALT WATER
PEOPLE



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Disponible en français sous le titre *L'Indien et la mer.*



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Closed captioned for
the deaf and the hard of hearing.
A decoder is required.

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The history of Canada's Native people has been a chronicle of loss, dispossession and a people's struggle to survive. The First Nations of the West Coast are no exception. For centuries, these "salt water people" inhabited a land rich in natural resources. Viewing themselves as "caretakers," rather than "owners" of the land, they subsisted on what the earth had to offer and protected their birthright for future generations. All of that changed with the arrival of the Europeans.

Eager to exploit the resources of the Pacific West Coast, European settlers and their governments began a process that would eventually dispossess and disenfranchise the Native population. Through laws that stripped them of their ability to acquire private property, limited their fishing rights, reduced the size of their reserves and prohibited them from voting, successive governments ensured that Native people had few claims to the land and its resources and even fewer paths of resistance.

By the 1970s, the impact of resource exploitation was beginning to take its toll. The effects of urban encroachment, oil spills, logging and overfishing signalled a growing crisis. Over the next twenty years, the Native people watched as the salmon runs steadily diminished. Beaches were over-harvested or became so polluted that harvesting was no longer viable. Despite the imposition of quotas, the herring runs remained threatened. On the freshwater rivers used for logging, bank erosion, flooding and the destruction caused by bark and chemical waste continued to pose a threat to all forms of life. Dismayed by the devastation they were witnessing year after year, tired of existing as "beggars in their own land," the Native people began to fight back in the courts and on the waterways in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Salt Water People documents the history and current struggle of the Coast Salish, Kwakiutl and Nuu-Chah-Nulst Nations to protect their rights and reassert their role as caretakers of their traditional land and fishing grounds. A film that celebrates the *beauty of the natural environment while mourning its gradual destruction*, **Salt Water People** provides a clear sense not only of what is being lost, but also what can be gained by listening to the tribal wisdom of a centuries-old Native culture. By giving voice to the beliefs and values of a Native tradition that sees human beings as one with nature, and the earth and its riches as an inheritance for future generations, the film offers hope and a goal to which all people might strive.

AUDIENCES

Of particular interest to environmental and Native groups, this film can be used to augment courses in Canadian History, Current Affairs, Political Science, Anthropology and Sociology at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Government institutions, community groups and professional associations can also use this film as a tool for development and discussion.

THEMES FOR DISCUSSION

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Native groups from Quebec to British Columbia blockaded roads, bridges, waterways and disrupted communications in an unprecedented show of protest. Survey media reports on Native protests and compare them to the issues raised in this film. Are there similar concerns that unite Native people across the country? How have governments responded and why?

Fishing and logging represent two of British Columbia's largest industries. Can the provincial and federal governments balance the demands of industry, consumers and workers with the need to protect the rights of citizens and preserve the environment for future generations? How can we as a society take a more active role in protecting our environment?

For centuries, Western civilization has had a tendency to dismiss or to romanticize the beliefs and traditions of ancient tribal cultures. Is it possible for one culture to learn from another? What, if anything, do the West Coast Native people have to teach us about their culture and about our own?

RELATED NFB FILMS AND VIDEOS

Uranium A film about uranium mining on Native land and its impact on the community and the country.

Hunters and Bombers A film about the environmental and political implications of low-level military jet training flights over Native land in Labrador.

Blockade: Algonquins Defend the Forest A film about the Barriere Lake Algonquin and their struggle to protect their land from the devastating impact of clear-cut logging.

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Color
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