

The Last Catch

Ashley Carter caught a preview of the second of three documentaries to be shown as part of the UK Green Film Festival this week...



Over the last decade it has been well publicised that wild stocks of tuna face imminent collapse. The number that migrate from the Atlantic to spawning grounds in the Mediterranean have dwindled to such an extent that strict new guidelines have been enforced in a desperate attempt to avoid extinction. The knock-on effect of these new rules has devastated the livelihoods of a generation of French fisherman.

From making a comfortable living and sustaining the economy of their local town, the fishermen of Sète in Southern France now face the prospect of barely managing to service the loan debt on their boats. Crewmembers face up to six months without money, food or shelter until government welfare kicks in. Boats are stripped of any valuable equipment and sold on to try and re-coup some of the debts. Others still are forced to illegally fish in Libyan waters to try and scrape a living. This grim reality of the modern day tuna fisherman is stoically presented in Markus CM Schmidt's new documentary *The Last Catch*.

Roberto Mielgo, a tuna fisherman turned environmentalist/Greenpeace lobbyist acts as a counterweight to the desperate plight of the fisherman. Armed with binoculars, his laptop and a seemingly endless supply of cigarettes, he grows increasingly obsessed with putting an end to the fishing of tuna during their spawning season, during which they are still not fully grown. Though his role is as the film's moral compass, there is something distinctly loathsome about the distant and disconnected Mielgo, naturally forcing the viewer's compassion towards the working-class, down-on-their-luck fishermen.

Although they all played their own parts in the over-fishing of the tuna, there is an overwhelming sense of disillusionment and desperation etched in the weathered faces of middle-aged men who aren't cut out for anything other than the sea. Men cut from the same cloth as *The Old Man and The Sea's* Santiago face being forced into a daunting new world for which they are ill-equipped and largely unnecessary. "For us..." says one, "it was more important to go out to sea with Dad than to study in school."

Though often stuck at a dawdling pace, some of *The Last Catch's* underwater cinematography is beautiful, offering a haunting glimpse into the peaceful waters under scrutiny, above which pure turmoil threatens the futures of a generation of men. Not a traditionally entertaining documentary, but thought-provoking and well-executed enough to deserve viewing.

The Last Catch will be shown at Broadway Cinema on Tuesday 3 June 2014 at 6pm as part of the UK Green Film Festival.

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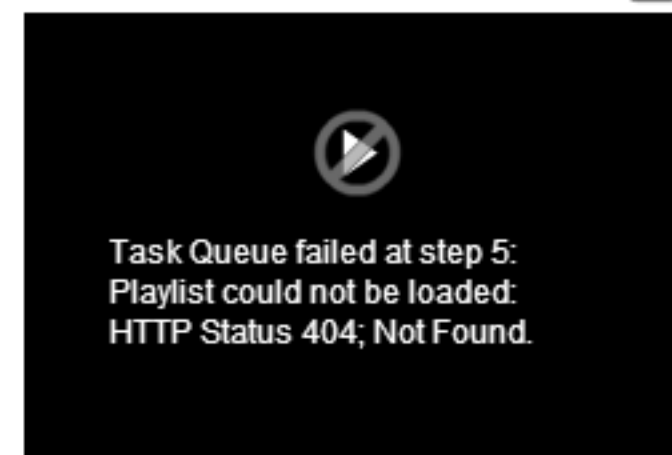
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