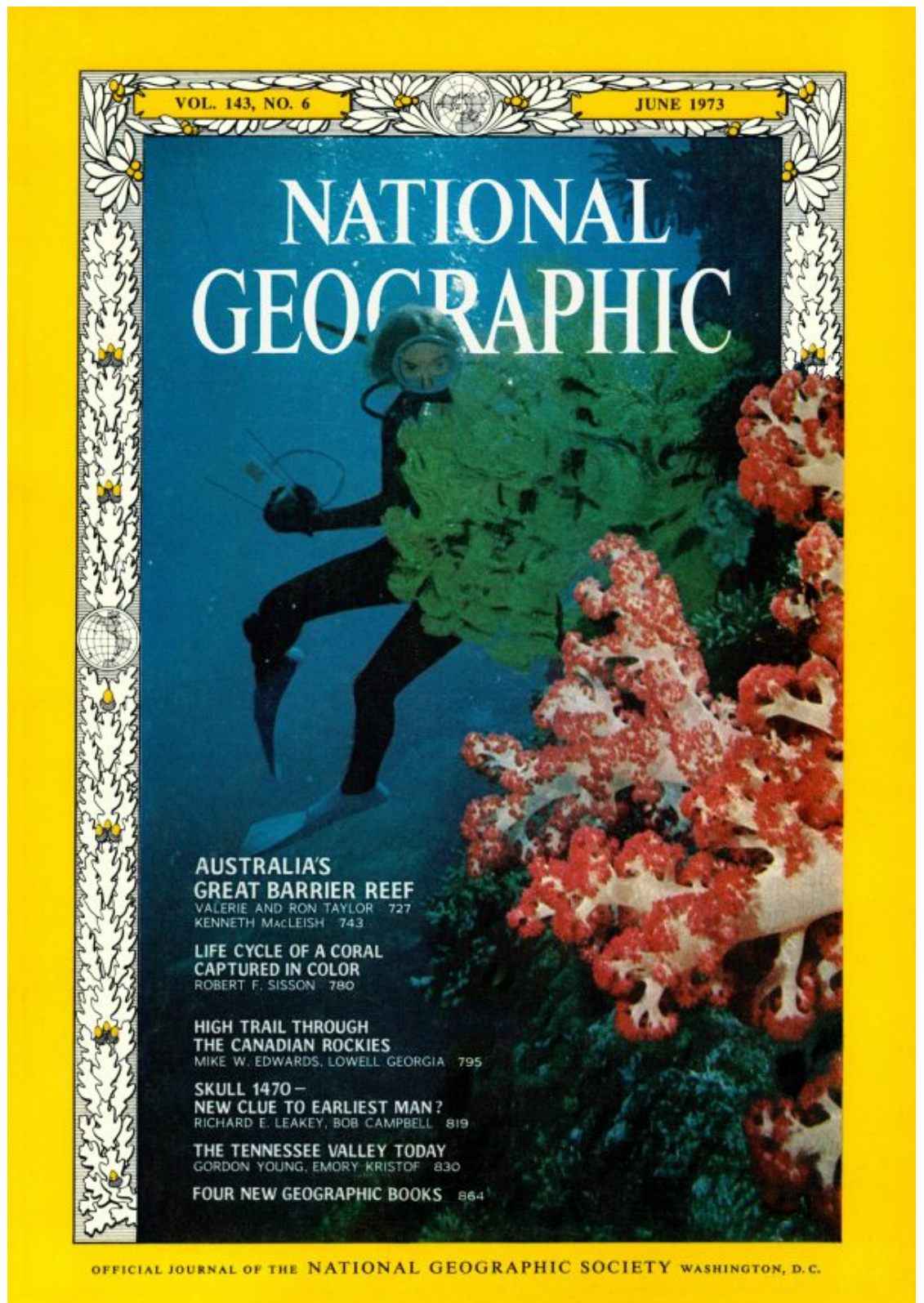

National Geographic Documentary Films Acquires Worldwide Rights for Underwater Exploration Feature ‘Playing With Sharks’ Out of Sundance

National Geographic Documentary Films announced today the acquisition of the feature documentary **Playing with Sharks**, from two-time Emmy-nominated director Sally Aitken, WildBear Entertainment and Dogwoof. The film documents the life of Australian icon, conservationist and filmmaker Valerie Taylor. Called “visually stunning,” “enthraling” and “gorgeous” by critics after its Sundance premiere Friday evening, *Playing with Sharks* captures the life of a woman ahead of her time — a true pioneer in both underwater filmmaking and shark research, whose life’s work has become the basis for much of what we know about sharks today. Through remarkable underwater archival footage, along with interviews with Valerie herself, the film follows this daring ocean explorer’s trajectory from champion spear fisher to passionate shark protector. From the birth of cage diving, to *Jaws* hysteria, to the dawn of cageless shark diving, Valerie became a trailblazing advocate for the ocean’s most maligned and misunderstood creatures. As a young woman in Australia in the 1950s, Valerie Taylor bucked the status quo, becoming a champion spear fisher in a sport dominated by men. She soon traded in her spear for a camera, documenting the undersea world as never before. With husband Ron behind the camera and Valerie’s willingness to get up close and personal with creatures of the deep, the team quickly gained attention as world-class, pioneering underwater filmmakers. The first ever to film a great white underwater, their shark sequences ultimately became the inspiration for a new novel and soon-to-be blockbuster hit — *Jaws* — with Valerie and Ron brought on to shoot all the underwater live shark scenes. The rest is history — *Jaws* went on to become a cultural phenomenon, smashing box office records and changing the film industry forever. But *Jaws* had other unforeseen consequences, solidifying sharks in the collective mindset as an underwater monster to be feared and hunted. Valerie would spend the rest of her life working to set the record straight, dispelling the fearsome misconceptions about the toothy predator and advocating for the protection and preservation of marine habitats such as the



Valerie with 'Bruce' the mechanical Great White during the filming of JAWS. (Ron and Valerie Taylor)

"We couldn't be happier to partner with Nat Geo Doc Films. It is the perfect home for **Playing with Sharks** and we know Nat Geo will embrace and promote its important themes of shark conservation and trailblazing women," said producer Bettina Dalton of WildBear Entertainment. "Dogwoof was with us all the way as both sales agents and investors; they committed to the journey with us from my first pitch to Anna Godas in Sundance 2019 right through to the final deal, which they negotiated and completed with great finesse." "It was love at first sight when Bettina pitched Valerie's story to us two years ago in Sundance and we decided to get involved as funders via TDog Productions (Dogwoof's production fund)," added Anna Godas, CEO, Dogwoof. "It's been the most incredible journey to see this film come to life. We couldn't be prouder to have helped make this project happen and couldn't have asked for a better team to craft it." "I can't think of a more perfect film premiering at Sundance this year for our Nat Geo Docs Film banner than **Playing with Sharks**," said Carolyn Bernstein EVP, Global Scripted Content & Documentary Films for National Geographic. "We see it as a coming home of sorts for Valerie, after she first appeared on the cover of National Geographic magazine in June 1973. Valerie's thirst for adventure and love for marine life jumps off the screen — hers is a truly unique and aspirational story and one we can't wait to share with



Valerie Taylor featured on the June 1973 cover of *National Geographic* magazine. (*National Geographic/Ron Taylor*) **Playing with Sharks** is created and produced by Bettina Dalton, WildBear Entertainment, and written and directed by Sally Aitken. It is executive produced by Alan Erson for WildBear; Anna Godas and Oli Harbottle for TDog; and Paul Wiegard for Madman Entertainment. A WildBear Entertainment production, with principal production investment and development support from Screen Australia, it is developed and financed with the assistance of Screen NSW. National Geographic Documentary Films has previously released director Ron Howard's **Rebuilding Paradise**; the Academy Award-nominated and Emmy-winning documentary feature **The Cave**; the Academy Award-, BAFTA- and seven-time Emmy Award-winning film **Free Solo**; the Sundance

Audience Award winner **Science Fair**; Emmy winners **LA 92** and **Jane**, both of which were included in the top 15 documentaries considered for an Academy Award in 2017; and Dupont Award winner **Hell on Earth: The Fall of Syria and the Rise of ISIS**. **About National Geographic Documentary Films** National Geographic Documentary Films is committed to bringing the world premium, feature documentaries that cover timely, provocative and globally relevant stories from the very best documentary filmmakers in the world. National Geographic Documentary Films is a division of National Geographic Partners, a joint venture between National Geographic and 21st Century Fox. Furthering knowledge and understanding of our world has been the core purpose of National Geographic for 133 years, and now we are committed to going deeper, pushing boundaries, going further for our consumers ... and reaching over 730 million people around the world in 172 countries and 43 languages every month as we do it. NGP returns 27 percent of our proceeds to the nonprofit National Geographic Society to fund work in the areas of science, exploration, conservation and education. For more information, visit natgeotv.com or nationalgeographic.com, or find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#), [LinkedIn](#) and [Pinterest](#). **About Dogwoof** Founded in 2003 by Andy Whittaker, Dogwoof is a London-based, documentary film company integrating production, sales and UK theatrical distribution. Dogwoof has so far released 26 Oscar®-nominated documentaries, with four wins and an additional three BAFTA winners; notable titles include Oscar®-winning and BAFTA-winning **Free Solo** (the UK's highest grossing documentary of 2018), BAFTA-nominated *Three Identical Strangers*, Oscar®-nominated *RBG*, BAFTA-winning *The Act of Killing* and *Blackfish*. Recent releases have included double-Oscar®-nominated *Honeyland*, Oscar®-nominated **The Cave**, and BAFTA-nominated *Apollo 11*, which was the UK's highest grossing documentary of 2019. Dogwoof will premiere six projects in Sundance 2021: **Playing with Sharks** (a Dogwoof Production), *Sabaya*, *Philly D.A.*, *Captains of Zaatari*, *Seeds of Deceit* and *Ailey*. Dogwoof's TDog production investment fund currently has five features and two series in production; the fund is focused on feature documentaries, docu-series and remake rights, gearing up the company toward vertical integration. **About WildBear Entertainment** WildBear combines the skills and experience of respected creative producers Bettina Dalton, Veronica Fury, Serge Ou, Alan Erson and Michael Tear. An integrated factual entertainment company, WildBear Entertainment works across television, theatrical, corporate, educational and government communications. WildBear has been commissioned by leading international platforms including BBC, National Geographic, Discovery, Netflix, Universal Pictures, Madman Entertainment, PBS, ZDF/Arte, CCTV, NTV, France Televisions, Mediawan, Viasat and Australian broadcasters Nine, Seven, Ten, ABC, SBS and Foxtel. With offices in three Australian capital cities and a comprehensive catalog of completed projects, WildBear is an ideal coproduction partner. WildBear also owns Content Mint (formerly Absolutely Wild Visuals), an internationally renowned stock footage library. The library holds thousands of hours of HD, 35mm, S16mm and other high-end video stock footage with a focus on travel, worldwide locations, wildlife and nature. **Media Contact** Kristin Montalbano, National Geographic, 202-912-3244, kristin.montalbano@natgeo.com