



WALRUSES, POLAR BEARS AND THE FIRED PROFESSOR

HOT TAKES

- 1 Walruses and polar bears are flourishing and 'climate change' poses no threat.
- 2 Naturally occurring events are being politically weaponised.
- 3 Political activism now overshadows rational and evidence-based factual discussion to the detriment of careers.

During the time she delivered lectures to elementary school students, the fired evolutionary biologist Susan Crockford, who was an adjunct professor at the University of Victoria (UVic) in British Columbia, Canada, says she was continually 'astonished to learn that every single teacher believed that only a few hundred to a few thousand polar bears were left'. She feels duty bound as a scientist to speak up, to point out that the global population is officially estimated to be in the tens of thousands.

Walruses and polar bears are flourishing in the Arctic and 'climate change' poses no threat. But thanks to sensationalist media commentary this might not be apparent to most people.

In April 2019, Netflix launched a new nature documentary series titled *Our Planet*. Narrated by cultural icon Sir David Attenborough, the second episode includes harrowing footage of walruses plunging over a cliff to their death. Viewers are told human-caused climate change has melted the sea ice, leaving these animals no choice but to gather on land. In a desperate attempt to escape overcrowding, we're told, hundreds climbed a cliff and fell 'from heights they should never have scaled'.

The *Times of London* promptly dubbed this footage a 'new symbol of climate change'. The producers, it said, regarded the plight of these walruses as 'the most powerful story they found during four years of filming'¹.

Yahoo News described the reaction of viewers. Some sobbed. Others had trouble sleeping. One woman declared the falling walrus clip 'the saddest thing I've seen in my life', before adding: 'humans really suck'. A second person said the show had been 'Extremely tough to watch but necessary because things need to change'².

'Humans suck.' 'Things need to change.' No doubt these were precisely the reactions the *Our Planet* crew had hoped to elicit. This series is what happens when the world's leading internet entertainment service (Netflix) teams up in a four year collaboration with the world's largest conservation organisation, the World Wildlife Fund Inc (WWF)³. The WWF is run by professional lobbyists who know fundraising is more successful if the public makes an emotional connection,

especially if we can be persuaded it is humanity's fault that walruses are plunging off cliffs.

Rather than being an accurate portrayal of reality, *Our Planet* is, as British journalist James Delingpole has aptly observed, 'green propaganda masquerading as entertainment'⁴. The script was written by professional spin doctors. Much of Attenborough's walrus narration is therefore pure fiction.

The Plight of the Walruses

It turns out walruses have always gathered on land. They have a boom-and-bust population cycle and are currently particularly abundant, which accounts for more than 100,000 massing on beaches in recent years. Being social animals, they crowd together – a behaviour that can lead to some of them being trampled, particularly if the herd is spooked. Walruses sometimes traipse about near cliffs. Sometimes they tumble off. In other words, the *Our Planet* clip shows perfectly natural events.

Figure 1: Walrus haul-out, Chukchi Sea⁵



Walruses mass on beaches. Super-herds of more than 100,000 are known to occur at the Cape Schmidt cliffs and Cape Serdtse-Kamen beaches.

In 2017, the US Fish and Wildlife Service concluded that walruses haven't been harmed by recent declines in sea ice, and that such harm was unlikely in the foreseeable future. This species, it says, 'has demonstrated an ability to adapt to changing conditions'⁶.

The Plight of the Polar Bears

Just as Pacific walruses are thriving, polar bears are also flourishing. The worldwide population has risen from about 10,000 in the 1960s to an official estimate of 26,000 in 2015. Surveys conducted since then suggest a total of about 28,500⁷.

This is surprisingly good news. Activists and some biologists had predicted that, as summer sea ice declined sharply by mid-century, two-thirds of the world's polar bears would vanish. When these summer sea ice conditions arrived decades earlier than expected in 2007, polar bears appeared doomed.

But polar bear numbers had not plummeted as expected. Indeed, by 2018 it appeared polar bears were continuing the same steady rate of increase that began after a 1973 international treaty protected them from overhunting.

Misrepresenting naturally occurring events is part of the political weaponisation of global warming rhetoric. But the bulk of field observations confirm that polar bears, like Pacific walrus, are thriving despite almost 50% less summer sea ice than there was in 1980. Neither species has experienced a climate emergency.

The Plight of the Fired Professor

Because her overall message that polar bears are flourishing conflicts with activist rhetoric, and because activists apparently complained to administrators, the academic research career of Susan Crockford came to an abrupt end in 2019. Crockford describes her expulsion as 'an academic hanging without a trial, conducted behind closed doors'.

Amid cinematic exaggeration and widespread climate-change hyperbole, she has been a calm, lonely, voice of reason. Much like Australian physicist Peter Ridd – sacked by James Cook University in 2018 – she has quietly challenged rhetorical excesses, striving to ensure that the public hears scientifically accurate information. Like Ridd, she has paid a price. There is now a climate of fear on her campus.

Former chair of UVic's philosophy department, Jeffrey Foss, says Crockford has been punished for speaking her own mind about matters of fact, which means she has been denied academic freedom and free speech. 'I'm beginning to lose faith and hope in the university system,' he says.

Where global warming, polar bears, walrus, and related topics are concerned, political activism now overshadows rational and evidence-based factual discussion.

Figure 2: Walrus and a polar bear in the Chukotka Autonomous Okrug, Russia⁵



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FACT SHEET #2: Climate Change in the Polar Regions

FACT SHEET #3: Counting Emperor Penguins

Information in this fact sheet has been drawn from *Climate Change: The Facts 2020* (IPA 2020), Chapter 1, by Donna Laframboise and Dr Susan J. Crockford. Fact Sheet series general editor: Dr Arthur Day

- <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/david-attenborough-s-our-planet-walrus-plunging-to-deaths-become-new-symbol-of-climate-change-23sbkwzlt>.
- Yahoo News*, <https://uk.news.yahoo.com/david-attenboroughs-planet-leaves-fans-traumatised-heartbreaking-walrus-scene-095709472.html>.
- https://wwf.panda.org/our_work/our_focus/projects/our_planet_netflix_wwf_nature_documentary/ "Our Planet is a Netflix original documentary series and a groundbreaking four year collaboration between Netflix, Silverback Films and WWF. It explores the rich natural wonders, iconic species and wildlife spectacles that still remain, and reveals the key issues that urgently threaten their existence."
- <https://www.breitbart.com/europe/2019/04/17/walrusgate-the-netflix-attenborough-scandal-gets-worse/>
- Source: Russian scientist via Shutterstock.
- <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2017-10-05/pdf/2017-21352.pdf>
- https://polarbears.science.files.wordpress.com/2018/02/crockford_state-of-the-polar-bear-2017_gwpf-report-29_feb-2018-final.pdf

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