

## ELYSIUM EPIC – MEDIA RELEASE

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### ***International team prepares for epic expedition to document Antarctic climate change issues & celebrate the 100th anniversary of Shackleton's Trans-Antarctic journey***

***Elysium Epic team will conduct an intensive photographic and scientific survey of the Antarctic, and document the effects of warming on Earth's most remote region***

On February 10, 2010, a 57-member team of explorers from 18 countries will meet in Ushuaia, Argentina – the world's southernmost city – to embark on an epic expedition to Antarctica. The expedition, named the Elysium Epic, has been convened by Project Director Michael AW of the Ocean Geographic Society. The Elysium Epic team includes some of the world's most celebrated image-makers and scientists. The team's mission is to capture compelling photographic images and film footage documenting the current status of fauna, flora, ice, seascapes, and landscapes throughout this pristine region, and produce a visual and scientific record that can serve as a benchmark for future assessments of climate change impacts on this remote, spectacular, and vulnerable place.<sup>1</sup>

Project Director Michael AW explains, "Elysium Epic is about extraordinary explorers using advanced imaging technologies to document the last great wilderness on our planet. The aims of the project are to create a visual library that documents the flora and fauna of Antarctica, and to produce a feature film and book to educate and inspire the public and commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the heroic and legendary journey of Sir Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic expedition in 1914."

The Elysium team will explore the route Shackleton and his crew travelled after their ship, the *Endurance*, was crushed in the pack ice of Antarctica's Weddell Sea. The expedition will travel in Shackleton's wake from the Antarctic Peninsula across the treacherous Drake Passage, and onward to South Georgia Island. The project team will strive to capture the splendor of this spectacular region in a manner that no one has ever achieved before.

The Antarctic Peninsula has increased in temperature by 3°C in the last 50 years. That is one of the largest rises in temperature ever documented in any place on Earth, and is more than twice the world's average temperature increase during the past several decades. Clearly the Antarctic Peninsula is an important indicator regarding climate change. But what implications does this dramatic rise in temperature have for the organisms that call the Antarctic home? Elysium team scientists, photographers and cinematographers will document the ways in which significant warming is affecting this vulnerable region. Images and scientific data will be recorded every step of the way during the expedition, resulting in photographic testimony, video documentation, crucial scientific samples, and key population estimates. The expedition will ultimately produce a feature film, a limited edition high-quality book, and a collection of images that will serve as benchmark documentation regarding the effects of climate change on the Antarctic Peninsula and South Georgia Island.

The Elysium Epic team is no ordinary group of explorers; they are some of the world's best wildlife photographers, film makers and marine scientists. The principal members include: David Doubilet,

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<sup>1</sup> For additional details, please see the Elysium Epic Manifesto at the end of this media release.

photographer-in-residence at National Geographic; Titanic and deep-sea vent discoverer Emory Kristof, who is also a National Geographic photographer-in-residence; BBC Wildlife Photographer of the Year winners Michael AW, Goran Ehlme, and Amos Nachoum; eight-time World Underwater Pictures Festival winner Leandro Blanco; master of black and white underwater imagery, Ernest Brooks II, lauded as the Ansel Adams of the Sea; acclaimed conservation photographer Jenny E. Ross, winner of the Nature's Best Award for Wildlife Photography and the Philip Hyde Award for Environmental Photography; chief scientist Cabell Davis, PhD of the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute, who is the director of the WHOI's Ocean Life Institute; Steve Nicol, PhD of the Australian Antarctic Division, who is a specialist in the dynamics of Southern Ocean ecosystems; and artist Wyland, renowned as the Michelangelo of the Sea.

Jonathan Shackleton, cousin of his legendary Irish forebear, is also part of the lead team and will be on site to tell the story of Ernest Shackleton and reveal how the hero managed epic feats in one of the most inhospitable regions of the world. Other team members include oceanographers, marine biologists, geophysicists, professional film makers, technical diving practitioners, and medical doctors. This is, by any visual or scientific standard, a dream team.

The Elysium Epic expedition serves three primary purposes. The first aim is to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Shackleton's remarkable journey. The second goal is to provide an intensive scientific survey and comprehensive visual record of the region at a crucial moment in time, to serve as a benchmark reference for generations to come. Surveys, photographs, and video of organisms above and below the ice will yield an unparalleled visual and scientific record. Perhaps the team will even discover some as yet unknown treasures. Photographs and videos obtained during the expedition will be collated into a publicly accessible index that can be used for scientific, educational, and conservation purposes. The third goal of the expedition is to create an extraordinary book and documentary feature film that will serve to enlighten, inspire and motivate the public and government officials regarding the need to protect the Antarctic and the rest of our planet from the ravages of climate change.

Photography and filming for the expedition will begin where Shackleton and his team fought to survive their unexpected and dire situation when they became trapped in the Antarctic ice. What will that location be like 98 years later? Will there still be the same vast expanses of ice in this time of global ocean change as existed when Shackleton and his men first experienced the region? Or has man's influence already irreversibly changed the landscape forever?

Midway through the expedition, the Elysium team will attempt to make landfall on Elephant Island – a desolate, fascinating, and historically important place that is notoriously difficult to land on (or even approach) due to its dense fogs, icebergs, rough seas, ice-covered mountainous terrain, and lack of safe anchorage. Throughout history just a handful of people have successfully landed on Elephant Island, and attempting to land there could prove to be exceptionally dangerous and perhaps impossible for the Elysium team. After their perilous rendezvous with Elephant Island, the team will then continue following the route of the Shackleton expedition and will sail to South Georgia Island. Ultimately, after experiencing and documenting the wonders of the Antarctic region and attempting to re-trace Shackleton's epic journey, the Elysium explorers will land at Grytviken, where Shackleton is buried.

Elysium Epic aims to be the world's only expedition of its kind, and will be entirely carbon neutral. The project team is working with experts in climate change science to calculate the carbon footprint of the expedition and to offset that footprint by investing in counterbalancing mechanisms that yield measurable results.

Beginning on 8 February 2010, the Elysium Epic explorers will report on their progress daily at ElysiumEpic.org. The team welcomes questions from the public, and especially from students, about climate change in the Antarctic, ecological issues throughout the region, and the Elysium Epic adventure itself. The team will respond live whenever possible, and will post updates to the expedition blog on a daily basis from 10 February to 2 March.

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## **Elysium Epic's Manifesto – A Call for a Change in Attitude Toward Our Oceans**

1. Elysium Epic's explorers recognize that global climate change is intimately related to ocean change. For the world to address climate change, we must address ocean change.
2. The oceans play an essential role in regulating global climate and regional temperature, and are crucial for controlling the carbon, oxygen, and water cycles of the planet. The oceans are a vital part of the complex geophysical and biochemical systems that support life on Earth.
3. The exchanges of cold and warm water that take place in the Antarctic's Southern Ocean and the seas of the Arctic are key drivers of oceanic thermohaline circulation around the globe, and thus play a fundamental role in controlling the world's climate.
4. There is strong evidence that, due to human impacts on our atmosphere stemming from the emission of greenhouse gases, significant changes are taking place in the chemical composition of the oceans. Those changes are affecting the oceans' pH levels and productivity, and are impairing the ability of ocean life to survive and thrive. These issues are vital signs, telling us that our planet is in distress.
5. The oceans harbor a great diversity of life, and supports complex interactions between species and their environment. Productivity of ocean life affects global climate through the carbon cycle and provides important protein to the world food supply.
6. If each of us accepts personal responsibility for becoming informed about climate change and ocean change issues, and for taking appropriate individual action to address the problems involved, collectively we will be able to achieve the results necessary to restore the health of our planet.

### **The Climate Change Paradigm: Atmosphere to Ocean to Climate**

The Elysium Epic's mission stems from its explorers' shared understanding that climate change is intimately related to ocean change. The oceans play an essential role in regulating global climate and

regional temperature, and are crucial for controlling the carbon, oxygen, and water cycles of the planet. The oceans are a vital part of the complex geophysical and biochemical systems that support life on Earth. For example, the exchanges of cold and warm water that take place in the Antarctic's Southern Ocean and the seas of the Arctic are key drivers of thermohaline circulation throughout all the oceans across the globe, and thermohaline circulation in turn plays a fundamental role in controlling the world's climate. Another example: There is strong evidence that, due to impacts on our atmosphere stemming from the emission of greenhouse gases, significant changes are taking place in the chemical composition of the oceans. Those changes are affecting the oceans' pH levels and productivity, and are impairing the ability of ocean life to survive and thrive. Impacts on the well-being of ocean life are beginning to affect other forms of life as well. These issues are vital signs, telling us that our planet is in distress.

Human impact on the oceans is increasing every year, with warming and acidification reducing ocean productivity, overdevelopment and pollution contaminating the seas, and an increasing demand for food causing over-harvesting of the world's fisheries. Addressing these issues requires a combination of exploration and quantitative analysis to understand the underlying processes controlling diversity and productivity of marine life. Such knowledge is essential to enable us to better protect ocean life and thereby protect ourselves.

### **The Strategy**

The members of the Elysium Epic expedition and all affiliated agents and organizations will embark on a systematic global awareness campaign, using a variety of publications and activities, to increase public and governmental understanding of climate change and ocean change in the Antarctic. A crucial goal is to explain that ocean change is a key element of climate change, and make clear that addressing the serious changes occurring in our oceans must be a part of addressing climate change if we are going to achieve the most beneficial outcomes.

### **Protecting Ocean Health**

Ocean life influences the chemical composition of the sea, thereby impacting ocean-atmosphere gas exchange and global climate. Human induced ocean warming and acidification are changing the balance between ocean biology and its physical and chemical environment. It is incumbent on us to explore and quantify ocean life and its environment, from plankton through top predators, in order to understand and protect the health of this vital component of our planet's biosphere. Studying key groups of animals like zooplankton (e.g., krill, copepods, salps), and higher predators (e.g., dolphins, sharks, whales, seals and seabirds) can help us keep our finger on the pulse of ocean life.

### **Saving the Ocean's Barometers**

Dolphins, sharks, and whales are crucial umbrella species in ocean ecosystems, and are therefore barometers of our oceans' health. By preserving the existence of these creatures in the oceans, we will be preserving an essential strand in the web of life on Earth. The indiscriminate culling of these magnificent and important animals must cease, and no effort should be spared to achieve that result.

### **Personal Responsibility**

The Elysium Epic explorers are each committed to using their expertise to increase worldwide understanding of ocean change as a key element of climate change. The explorers have taken on the personal responsibility of achieving that goal by following in the wake of Shackleton's epic 20<sup>th</sup> century

expedition, and by expanding upon the Shackleton mission to create an unparalleled artistic portrait and crucial scientific index of the current conditions in the Antarctic as climate change begins to take a toll on the region. The Elysium Epic explorers are dedicated to the notion that preservation of life on Earth as we know it depends on each individual accepting personal responsibility for educating him or herself about climate change issues and for reducing his or her own carbon footprint.

### **For Future Generations**

The Elysium Epic explorers will strive to create a comprehensive and compelling artistic portrait of the Antarctic, and document its current ecological status scientifically. The explorers hope the fruits of their efforts will bring the plight of this crucial region to the attention of the world, will inspire action to fight climate change, will yield vital benchmark data for measuring the future effects of Antarctic warming, and will comprise a magnificent collection of sights, sounds, and information to be treasured by future generations.

### **The Declaration**

This Manifesto affirms that the Elysium Epic is more than just an exploration event. It is a commitment by the team of explorers to a greater goal beyond the adrenalin rush of a challenging adventure. The Elysium Epic is the beginning of an ongoing commitment to inspire and enlighten the general public and government decision-makers around the world, and to motivate everyone to take essential action to restore the health of our planet.

**For the ELYSIUM EPIC CONSORTIUM – OceanNEvironment Australia**  
**ElysiumEpic.org**

