

# Dolphin Smile

**Dolphin Smile** is produced by IBA based in Israel. It presents a group of small children who can make a difference. Yael, 12 years old, lives in Eilat with her friends “The Dolphin Squad” who spend every minute of their spare time on the reef. Yael has a special dolphin friend – Sheba. Sheba becomes sick and dies. There are suspicions that her death was caused by the pollution coming from a new construction site very close to the reef. A solution is needed to diminish the pollution! There are a few ideas, the children have not decided yet. The film follows their initiatives. Will they succeed?

**Dolphin Smile** was one of the PRIX JEUNESSE INTERNATIONALE 2010 finalists in the 7-11 Non-fiction category.

## International experts’ opinions



Figure 1: **Dolphin Smile** is about the preservation of the reef in Israel.



Figure 2: Yael, the protagonist of the program, who is concerned about the safety of the reef.



Figure 3: One of the dolphins died due to pollution in the water.

Some of the international experts simply loved the program as it showed the perspectives of the children and their initiatives. “While I felt like it was maybe a slightly weaker program in some ways – a little lighter – it showed kids doing things. I think that the most successful programs [...] are the ones where you see a kid who is actually doing something his – or herself. I think that is really important for them to see. I thought it was cool how these kids actually went to the reef and they were participating actively and getting to know the marine biologist – or whomever was training the dolphins – could see a career for themselves, maybe, which is important modelling, and that they actually did something: *We are going to make it happen; we are going to go and talk to the people and sign petitions* – even if it didn’t result in anything. I think it is good for such little kids to rally themselves and try to make a difference” (female expert, USA).

There was an emotional touch to the program that was appreciated by the international experts. “Because of the dolphins, I think – animals: if you have animals in children’s program, I think they are more touched. And a dying dolphin is even more touching” (female expert, Germany).

Some international experts simply admired the courage of the children. “What I thought was wonderful about it, was the sense of urgency for these kids. It wasn’t just about telling the story; it was to do something, and if it doesn’t work, you try it again. It wasn’t a simplified story. Frankly, this is what the kids growing up are going to be dealing with: a dead Gulf, whatever it is, that the world is dying around them – and this sense of dealing with it. It is not a simple question, and something has to be done. Even in the end,



Figure 4: The group of kids is concerned about the safety of the dolphins.

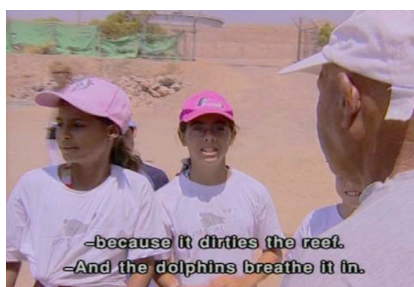


Figure 5: The group interact with a lot of people around the reef.



Figure 6: They meet the government officials.



Figure 7: They talk with children and ask them to volunteer to save the reef.

it wasn't really resolved, because those were big ships out there. They probably weren't going to win, but you saw that challenge. It had some problems with that as well, but I think there was an honesty and a sense of urgency for the kids that was actually really interesting in that" (male expert, USA).

Many international experts liked the theme of the program but suggested that it had a great room for improvement. "With the Dolphins, I thought it was, for me, similar, because the children also tried to reach their goal and they didn't. I thought this was even weaker, because they were just putting up signs saying: *Ok, if you want to do something*. I was left with the feeling: *ok, nothing will happen*. People pour the oil into the water, and the Dolphins die. It was also very sad" (female expert). Some suggested that the program had limited resources: "It is the same message, but I think they had fewer resources to go for it, and that is really frustrating" (female expert, Brazil).

Some also questioned if the program was scripted. "Yes, I didn't understand, with the dolphin program, whether they are naturally there, or whether it is in a closed area; because it looked like it was enclosed. It looked like the public went to see the dolphins there" (female expert, UK).

They were also perplexed about the reasoning of the program. "I also know that it was following the girl, but I never understood the pollution part, because was there any pollution from these boats? And that the girl drove it so far that there must have been some grown-up people behind – when they were going out with boats. Because, you never know if there is any pollution from it" (male expert, Norway). Though they appreciated the theme of the program, it left them with a feeling of "false facts." "It had a good start, didn't it? It was caused by a dolphin dying, and so everything went from there. Was the reason of the death of the dolphin described in the program? They guessed. There was no evidence" (female expert, Norway). "I thought that it can mislead the children watching the TV – *you can always fight without facts*. Yes, there could have been something else wrong with that dolphin" (female expert, Japan).

They also questioned the direction of the program. "In terms of dramatic structure: I think the campaign in the Israeli program is flawed, because I want to know why the dolphin has actually been kept in the cage anyway. But, they are enclosed" (male expert, UK). A female expert from Israel provided an explanation. "No, they are not in a cage. It is a big space in the sea, and they closed – there is a net – but it is a big huge area. They closed it with a net, because they don't want the sharks to get inside the dolphins' area."

screenshots from *Dolphin Smile* © IBA



Figure 8: They are hopeful that the campaign will be a success.

The international experts compared the program with a Danish program, “Operation X.” “There is a culture mix between – I would say that the Danish program was more like reality. I think it is a kind of reality. Our film was documentary. Of course, I was there as director, but it was a documentary. We put the kids in the Mayor’s office, and what happened, happened. I think the Danish program is a kind of reality. I can see the production behind it, and I can see that they brought the politician to the school. They decided that they are going to play like it is. You can see that there are grown-ups behind the show and the directing that is going on there” (female expert, Israel).

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