

Media Briefing

Greenpeace 50th anniversary

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Subject	Greenpeace 50th anniversary

Summary

Greenpeace, one of the world's oldest and best known environmental protection organisations, celebrates its 50th year of fighting for a greener, fairer, more peaceful world on 15 September 2021.

Over the last 50 years Greenpeace's campaigns have taken many forms - from nonviolent direct action at sea defending our oceans from whaler's harpoons and toxic dumping, speaking truth to power - be it political or corporate, fighting for the environment in courts around the world, collaboration with journalists, authors, musicians and celebrities, relief work from the Amazon to the Pacific, fighting fires in Russia and Indonesia, and of course - taking nonviolent direct action on land, and at sea with our ships.

Greenpeace has evolved and changed massively over the years - from a small group of predominantly male, white, Canadians and Americans taking action on local issues to a globally diverse organisation operating in every continent on earth and working on root causes - the very power structures and mindsets which enable ongoing environmental destruction - as part of an ever-growing international ecological movement.

Greenpeace's global mission today is focused on changing mindsets and shifting power dynamics to protect environmental boundaries in the face of escalating symptoms of climate change and biodiversity loss.

Key points

Organisation size: Greenpeace now comprises 26 independent national/regional offices in over 55 countries across Africa, Europe, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, as well as a coordinating body, Greenpeace International with 3532 staff around the world.

Supporters: Greenpeace is supported by 3.3 million people worldwide and has a reach of 92.9 million people through our social and email channels.

Mission: Greenpeace is an independent global campaigning organisation that acts to change attitudes and behaviour, to protect and conserve the environment in order to ensure the ability of the earth to nurture life in all its diversity and to do this through nonviolent means emphasising personal responsibility and action based on conscience.

Quotes, videos and photos of Major Greenpeace wins

Greenpeace 50th Anniversary Collections

[A collection of the most iconic Greenpeace photographs over five decades](#)

Videos of iconic campaign moments by decade

- [Greenpeace 50th Anniversary Video \(Clean\)](#)
- [Greenpeace Highlights: 1970s \(Videos\)](#)
- [Greenpeace Highlights: 1980s \(Videos\)](#)
- [Greenpeace Highlights: 1990s \(Videos\)](#)
- [Greenpeace Highlights: 2000s \(Videos\)](#)
- [Greenpeace Highlights: 2010s \(Videos\)](#)

World Park Antarctica Campaign

Greenpeace established the World Park Base - a year-round Antarctic base located at Cape Evans on Ross Island in the Ross Dependency. The base was created in order to allow Greenpeace to have a seat at the bargaining table for the Antarctic Treaty Nations. Greenpeace activists ran the base, in one of the world's most isolated regions, from 1987 to 1991, which was when the members of the Antarctic Treaty agreed to adopt a new Environmental Protocol, including a 50-year minimum prohibition on all mineral exploitation.

Photos and videos [here](#)

Former Greenpeace campaigner Catherine Fitzpatrick said:

“It was an incredible campaign over more than a decade in the 1980s where Greenpeace worked with hundreds of other NGOs, governments and individuals around the world with the truly ambitious aim of protecting an entire continent forever.

“One of the innovative tactics Greenpeace undertook was to set up a World Park Base in Antarctica for five years. We set up a permanent base on the ice staffed year-round by scientists, activists and skilled outdoors people to enable us to have a voice at the Antarctic Treaty table. The base allowed us to challenge national territorial claims with an argument that Antarctica should be preserved as a global commons—belonging to no one.

“No non-governmental organization had ever set up a base in Antarctica; there were many obstacles, both political and practical. The intrepid Greenpeace pioneers stayed from 1987 to 1991 playing a key role in highlighting threats to the continent.”

Anti-whaling campaign

Greenpeace has sent anti-whaling expeditions to the Antarctic nine times, starting in 1989, with the last one in 2008. Greenpeace’s expeditions and international pressure has been key to Japan’s decision to abandon Antarctic whaling in 2018.

Photos and videos [here](#)

Former Greenpeace activist Mikey Rosato who took part in the 2005-6 expedition said:

“We set sail with the primary objective of bearing witness, a guiding principle of Greenpeace that remains a key part of the organisation’s advocacy work to this day. We never expected them to hunt in front of us.

“Greenpeace was the first organisation to shine a light on the barbaric practice of whaling in modern times. A 2001 expedition captured the first images of Japanese whalers slaughtering these majestic creatures. Greenpeace’s very presence was enough to deter them.

“That changed completely in the following years and by 2005 all cards were on the table, it became a bloody daily battle so straight away we had to draw up battle plans. The basic plan was to place ourselves between the harpoons and the whales and to do that for as long as possible. The whalers carried on as if we weren’t there. It was shocking. The images are burned into my memory

“One of the tactics we developed was to obscure the harpooner’s view using a stream of water, coming from a pipe attached to a high-powered pump at the back of the small inflatable boats we used to zip between the whales and the whaling ships. It would blast water up into the air and create a cloud of mist that would prevent the harpooner from getting a clear line of sight to the whales they were hunting.

“But for that to work the boat needed to be no more than 10 metres from the ship, which is quite risky when you’re doing that in choppy waters at high speed as you try and dodge tiny icebergs. If you got one thing wrong this huge ship was going to run over the top of our boat and we got close quite a few times. Death was looming. They were suicidal missions that we went on willingly every day. That happened every day for about a month. I remember telling the crew of the boat that ‘when I say jump, don’t ask questions. Just jump over the side of the boat’.

“These tactics were super effective. When three hunter ships came across a pod of whales, they would kill one every 15 minutes. There was a procession between them and the mother ships, dropping off dead or dying whales. Our tactics reduced the kill rate down to about one whale every four hours.”

French nuclear testing

Ben Pearson was involved in the campaign against French nuclear testing in the South Pacific in the 1990s. The campaign saw a testing moratorium in 1991, a reduction in planned tests, and an eventual end to nuclear testing in the Pacific in 1996.

Photos and videos [here](#)

“Greenpeace sent ships into the South Pacific to directly confront the French ... we helped inspire people to oppose the testing. While there was already widespread outrage and opposition, Greenpeace was really critical to raising the tempo of the whole campaign.

“Big Greenpeace actions don't always lead to immediate wins in the sense of a new law or change of practice but they shift things. They inspire people, they shift the dynamics of an issue and bring it to greater prominence. Someone once called them 'mind bombs' and I think that's right.

“One way of asking the question is “what have been the victories of Greenpeace?” Another way of asking the question is ‘what would the world look like now if GP had never existed?’ It wouldn't be nearly as healthy and we wouldn't have made nearly as much progress on big issues like nuclear testing and climate change, despite everything that's going on.

Protecting the Great Australian Bight from offshore oil drilling

From 2016 until 2020, Greenpeace campaigned for BP, Chevron and Norwegian state oil company Equinor to abandon plans to open up a new offshore oil frontier in the pristine waters of the Great Australian Bight, off the coast of southern Australia. Eighty-five percent of species found in the Bight are found nowhere else on Earth and the Bight is the home and breeding ground of the endangered Southern Right Whale. Working with local communities, Traditional Owners, surfers and the seafood industry, Greenpeace saw off the threat when Equinor became the last of the three oil majors to abandon its drilling plans.

Photos and videos [here](#)

Greenpeace actions coordinator Ella Drinkwater said:

“BP, Chevron and Norway's state oil company Equinor, all abandoned their plans to drill for oil in the Bight in the face of a sustained and successful multi-year campaign by Greenpeace.

“Greenpeace worked with local communities including fisherpeople, tourism operators, Traditional Owners, surfers and residents who were united in their view that it wasn't worth the risk of a catastrophic oil spill or risking the Bight and its unique marine life to drill for oil that would make the climate crisis worse.”

Highlights from Greenpeace's 50-year history

1971 - The very first Greenpeace voyage took place on 15 September 1971 when the *Phyllis Cormack* (also called "Greenpeace") departed Vancouver, Canada for Amchitka Island.

The goal of the 12 people on board was to halt nuclear tests on the island by sailing into the restricted area. The crew on-board the ship are the pioneers of the green movement who formed the original group that eventually became Greenpeace.

But the ship and crew never reached the island - they were intercepted by the US coast guard and considered their journey a failure - until they returned home. Despite not reaching their destination, the first-ever Greenpeace action created so much pressure on the US government that the tests were cancelled, and Amchitka Island remains a nature reserve to this day.

Mid 70s - One of Greenpeace's earliest campaigns was against commercial whaling, which had devastated the species - pushing some of them to the very brink of extinction in the first half of the 20th Century.

The campaign, which began in the mid-1970s, shone a spotlight on the industry in a way that had never happened before. Showing the public images of whales being killed sparked a movement and a sea-change in popular opinion against whaling. The International Whaling Commission (IWC) had to change. After over a decade of committed campaigning, the "Save the Whales" movement triumphed when the IWC voted for a moratorium (ban) on commercial whaling in 1982.

1977 - In its first Australian operation, Greenpeace successfully campaigned to close Australia's last whaling station in Albany, Western Australia.

1985 - Greenpeace ship the *Rainbow Warrior* conducted "Operation Exodus", an evacuation of the Rongelap island in the Pacific Ocean, when Rongelap suffered a nuclear fallout from US nuclear tests in 1954. Greenpeace activists were asked for help by the islanders and ultimately evacuated more than 200 adults and children, as well as 100 tonnes of belongings, to Mejjato.

1985 - On 10 July 1985, the Greenpeace ship the *Rainbow Warrior* was moored in Auckland, New Zealand – ready to confront nuclear testing in the Moruroa Atoll - when French secret service agents planted two bombs on the hull. The resulting explosion sank the ship and killed 35-year-old Portugal-born Greenpeace photographer Fernando Pereira.

Initially, the French government denied all knowledge of the operation, but it became soon obvious that they were involved. Eventually, French prime minister Laurent Fabius appeared on television and told a shocked public that the agents of the DGSE (Secret Service) sank the ship, and they acted on orders.

The world reacted with shock and anger to a foreign government choosing to respond to peaceful protest with deadly force.

Greenpeace replaced the original *Rainbow Warrior* with a new vessel, and for 22 years, the

second *Rainbow Warrior* campaigned for a green and peaceful future. In 2011, the third *Rainbow Warrior* - the world's first purpose-built environmental campaigning ship - was launched to carry on the original's spirit.

1987 - Greenpeace established the World Park Base - a year-round Antarctic base located at Cape Evans on Ross Island in the Ross Dependency. The base was created in order to allow Greenpeace to have a seat at the bargaining table for the Antarctic Treaty Nations. Greenpeace activists ran the base, in one of the world's most isolated regions, from 1987 to 1991, which was when the members of the Antarctic Treaty agreed to adopt a new Environmental Protocol, including a 50-year minimum prohibition on all mineral exploitation.

1995 - Greenpeace activists occupied the Brent Spar Oil Rig in the North Sea. Activists occupied the rig for more than three weeks as part of a coordinated worldwide campaign putting pressure on Shell's proposed "deep sea disposal" of the rig that included 11,000 tonnes of oil into the ocean. The campaign was eventually successful with Shell abandoning its plans to dispose of the oil rig in the ocean.

2001 - Greenpeace captures the first images of Japanese whalers hunting in the Antarctic.

2004 - Greenpeace successfully campaigns to end shale oil mining in Queensland.

2005/6 - Greenpeace anti-whaling expeditions in the Antarctic disrupt Japanese hunting operations and protect hundreds of whales from slaughter, including vulnerable and endangered species. Japan leaves the International Whaling Commission and ceases Antarctic whaling in 2018.

2010- Greenpeace pressures Nestlé to stop rainforest destruction. The multinational food and drink processing conglomerate first agreed to stop purchasing palm-oil from sources that destroy Indonesian rainforests. The decision capped eight weeks of massive pressure from consumers via social media and non-violent direct action by Greenpeace activists as the company conceded to the demands of a global campaign against its Kit Kat brand.

2013 - A peaceful protest in the international waters targeting the Russian state-owned energy giant Gazprom ended with the arrest of 28 Greenpeace activists and two freelance journalists by the coast guard. The group, who would become known as the "Arctic 30", was kept in jail for two months. After intense campaigning and worldwide support, the activists were finally released, and the controversial drilling practice in the Arctic they were protesting became a global hot topic.

In August 2015, an international arbitral tribunal found that Russia was liable for the boarding, seizing, and detention of the Arctic Sunrise as well as for the subsequent measures taken against the vessel and the individuals on board and was ordered to pay damages.

2019 - Big polluters found responsible for human rights harm. In December 2019, the Commission on Human Rights of the Philippines (CHR) presented their initial report on the resolution for the National Inquiry on Climate Change (NICC) in Madrid during COP25.

The results of the nearly three-year investigation found that, for the first time ever, that the world's carbon majors were responsible for human rights harms resulting from the climate crisis.

It was the world's first national human rights investigation into big polluters and was a landmark climate justice victory for impacted communities and reflected many years of work. Greenpeace Southeast Asia, together with 14 organisations and 20 individuals, filed the petition on 22 September 2015 calling for this investigation to take place. Over 100,000 signatures were gathered in support of the initiative online from Change.org, SumOfUs and Greenpeace Southeast Asia, while eight international NGOs also provided advice and support.

2020 - Norwegian oil giant Equinor follows the lead of BP and Chevron and abandons plans to drill for oil in the Great Australian Bight.

2021 - Greenpeace's REnergise campaign to encourage major corporations to source their electricity from 100% renewable sources by 2025 has led 15 companies to make the commitment, including Bunnings, Woolworths, Coles and ALDI, leading to the abatement of 6,252,760 tonnes of carbon per year (based on the companies' own reporting in 2019).

2021 - Greenpeace Australia Pacific defeats a legal challenge by Australia's biggest climate polluter, electricity giant AGL, in the Federal Court and helps secure the right to freedom of expression. The Honourable Justice Burley found that Greenpeace had not infringed AGL's trademark or copyright, saying that "copyright protects the owner's interest in the artistic work, it does not provide a mechanism for protecting a copyright owner's reputation". He held that "it is not the use of AGL's logo in the campaign that causes damage, but rather the informational message" – that AGL is Australia's biggest climate polluter.

2021 - Groundbreaking court decision in climate case against Shell

In a historic verdict, a Dutch court ruled that Shell must reduce its CO2 emission by a net 45 percent in 2030 relative to 2019. This is the first time a major fossil fuel company was held accountable for its contribution to climate change and ordered to reduce its carbon emissions throughout its whole supply chain.

The climate case was brought by Friends of the Earth Netherlands (Milieudefensie), along with Greenpeace Netherlands, other NGOs, and 17,379 individual co-plaintiffs.

The ruling is a clear message to the fossil fuel industry. Legal experts expect that the ruling will spark more climate litigation around the world. Different jurisdictions mean different legal avenues, but plaintiffs around the world can and will use the underlying principle that fossil fuel producers have obligations to reduce emissions in line with the science.

2021 - Germany's highest court, the German Constitutional Court, ruled on April 29 that the Climate Protection Law passed by the German government in 2019, is partially unconstitutional and has to be brought in line with the Paris Agreement.

The Court largely accepted the complaint by nine young people, supported by Greenpeace Germany, and two other German NGOs, that the country's failure to draw a clear emissions reduction path from 2030 to carbon zero was unconstitutional. The Court said this violated the young plaintiff's basic human rights and that Germany could not offload the obligation to cut emissions at the expense of younger and future generations' fundamental rights without providing precautionary steps to ensure a transition to climate neutrality respecting these rights.

The decision reinforces a global standard that climate protection is a human right that is increasingly recognised by courts around the world.

Comments from spokesperson

Greenpeace Australia Pacific CEO David Ritter

"I've loved Greenpeace since I was a kid, admiring the courage, creativity and determination of people from all over the world, working together to stop nuclear testing, and to take on the biggest polluters and environmental destroyers on the planet.

"From the preservation of Antarctica for nature and science, to the end of nuclear testing, the banning of drift-net fishing and the phasing out of ozone-destroying CFCs, there's no denying the massive impact of Greenpeace.

"Today, we've got more than a million people as part of the Greenpeace network in Australia Pacific alone. Along with our proud independence - we don't accept funds from any government or business anywhere in the world - this is what gives us the strength to take on the greatest threats to our climate and environment."

Greenpeace International Executive Director, Jennifer Morgan said:

"As we mark 50 years since the first Greenpeace voyage, biodiversity loss is accelerating, the climate emergency is deepening and inequality is spiralling. Now, more than ever, we need collective authentic action and togetherness as we are at crossroads.

"Over the last five decades, there have been many campaigns and victories to preserve a green, peaceful, and just future. Then and now, Greenpeace aims to transform our current systems, alongside allies, where profit and pollution are put before people and planet.

"Greenpeace's ultimate hope is to not have to exist, and while it is a struggle, our story is one of hope in action and people power. The last 50 years have shown us that radical change is possible as long as we remain resilient and hopeful, but the stakes are higher now than ever. People can be extraordinary, compassionate and courageous in the face of adversity and Greenpeace would not operate without the millions of allies, supporters and donors who share our same values."

Peter Manning, Executive Producer of Four Corners 1985 'French Connections' episode on the bombing of the Rainbow Warrior, said:

"Greenpeace has got a terrific reputation for activism and for pressing the limits of society's standards about what you can do and what you can't do.

"There was a lot of talk in Sydney, certainly, about horror at what the French had done to allegedly a Western friend. It shocked a lot of people, there was a lot of discussion about it. It helped build the name of Greenpeace. My instincts were that Greenpeace was threatening to cause so much trouble in the South Pacific about nuclear tests, that the French would have to do something which would be aggressive to them, to allegedly stop them going into the area which would be dangerous for them, even healthwise. But actually, what the French would've wanted was to hide the fact that so many nuclear activities were happening in the South Pacific, a long way from France.

"I think what it helped to do was to put the name, the word 'Greenpeace' up in lights. After that, they were obviously seen by institutions in Australia and America and Europe as a force to be reckoned with. It was a bit 'swashbuckling'. It was marine bravery on behalf of Greenpeace.

"I think Greenpeace helped put on the policy map the question of nuclear power in our district, meaning the South Pacific. To see that happen to NZ, a close place to Australia, with the ANZAC tradition and all that kind of stuff, Greenpeace achieved putting nuclear power and its dangers on the map.

"[The nuclear debate] was a live issue in Australia, and in a way what the Rainbow Warrior incident played off was 'we've had this, and now look what's happening to New Zealand' using Greenpeace and blowing them up and killing a Portuguese photographer. Greenpeace was pushing that subject, and then was the centre of the action. Greenpeace had a lot to do with linking up to the broader debate."

Journalist Lina Caneva, who travelled on the Rainbow Warrior while making a documentary for the Seven Network program *The World Around Us* in 1993, said:

"Greenpeace, I believe, has changed the collective understanding of the importance for all of us to care about the environment. I think Greenpeace's hard-fought public perception is one of trust and authority.

"The name Greenpeace has had a huge impact on the Australian psyche. It has a reputation for fighting hard on the environment and even after the sinking of the first Rainbow Warrior in Auckland Harbour, they came back hard to keep campaigning to the present day.