

+FOUR corners

EDITED BY JOANNA WANE

Underwater cameraman Andrew Penniket in the 1974 deep-sea diver helmet he acquired while filming in Russia's Lake Baikal, the world's deepest and largest body of fresh water.



SIMON DAREBY

In the deep end

Underwater cameraman Andrew Penniket champions life below the surface.

Roaming the oceans for the past two decades as an internationally acclaimed underwater cameraman and wildlife filmmaker has been a dream career for Andrew Penniket.

To counterbalance his often hectic filming schedules, he also manages Te Kakano, a community-funded native nursery in Wanaka, and tends the small family vineyard he and his wife Sue have planted around their house, producing Minaret Peaks pinot noir.

But between projects – he's just about to start filming part of a series about biodiversity hotspots in New Zealand for a global project – he's turned his attention to educating the next generation, with stories starring real sea creatures to counter what he considers a cartoon view of ocean life.

"We've got animated penguins and fish doing their thing [*Happy Feet*, *Finding Nemo*]. It's as if we don't need real animals any more. Kids can watch films like that while the real ones are going extinct."

He recently finished a youth-targeted DVD, *Fish for the Future*, for NZ Forest and Bird that examines the need for marine reserves, and is working on funding for a sequel of his children's tale about a deep-sea diver and the sea life he befriends underwater, *Hard Hat Harry and the Pearls of Wisdom*.

Filed by Penniket and a few of his diving mates off Stewart Island three years ago and narrated by children's TV presenter Suzy Cato, the film has been distributed by the Department of Conservation to schools around the country and is a change in tempo from the big-budget productions that have involved Penniket in more than 50 documentaries around the globe.

He's been an Emmy Award finalist for his camera work on the *Equator* series, has worked as a senior cameraman for the *Planet Earth* series with the BBC, and his production and camera work for *Cold Water*, *Warm Blood* on

marine mammals in Kaikoura earned him the prestigious Golden Dolphin award at the International Documentaries of the Sea Festival in Italy.

Originally from Warkworth, Penniket trained and worked as a marine scientist before his diving skills and knowledge of wildlife behaviour led him to start his filming career with the Natural History Unit in the early 1980s. Along with his "diving heroes", marine conservationists Wade Doak and the late Kelly Tarlton, he's watched the Poor Knights marine reserve develop, and has some strong views on the need for more reserves to sustain fish stocks.

"As tourist attractions, marine reserves are far more profitable than an equivalent area of fished coastline," he says. "The Poor Knights reserve supports more than a hundred dive guides, skippers and retailers, as well as accommodation and hospitality workers."

Penniket is strongly opposed to the Government's recent decision to stop DoC from applying for new reserves and sees it as a precedent for privatisation of coastal areas. Only a tiny percentage of New Zealand's coastline is currently designated as no-take zones, which gives breeding stocks little chance to sustain themselves.

Minimum-size regulations for some species are also a concern. "The problem with crayfish is that they get only one or two seasons of breeding before they reach the minimum legal harvestable size. The fisheries regulations are the equivalent of a farmer sending all his breeding ewes off to the works after they have had their first lamb," he says. "A small female cray may have 20,000 eggs but a very large female may carry a half a million – 25 times as many. And the eggs are larger, producing larger larvae with greater survival chances."

As to whether the nation can afford more marine reserves, Penniket is definite. "The simple answer: we can't afford not to have them."

TIM BREWSTER