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FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT: On Top of the World

Airs 8.30 pm Monday January 29th on ABC TV and iview

Is the world going mad when Greenlanders fight drought and brushfires and catch warm water fish? A decade after discovering a farming boom in Greenland, Eric Campbell returns to see how locals are facing up to climate change.

When Greenland scientist Teunis Jansen cuts open the stinking guts of a bluefin tuna, he unlocks a secret to the world's climate.



“Climate change takes many surprising ways,” he observes, as he delves into the big fish’s belly.

The tuna is full of whole mackerel, a warm water fish that is suddenly abundant in Greenland’s waters, in turn attracting more tuna as well. So abundant that it now accounts for up to a quarter of the island’s exports.

For Greenlanders, this is a happy quirk of the warming that is gripping their formidable land. While the rest of the world fights to stop a two-degree temperature rise, it’s already a fact in much of Greenland.

Ten years ago Eric Campbell met farmers there excited by the prospect of longer growing seasons. Now he returns to find some doing well - but battling a scourge familiar to Australian farmers.

“They’ve had a lot of droughts... It’s become more or less the new normal,” agronomist Kenneth Hoegh tells Campbell.

Inuit photographer Adam Lyberth grieves for his land as he records its ancient glaciers crumbling, its vast ice cap melting like never before. Sandy desert sits alongside melting ice. Tundra fires, says Lyberth, are spooking reindeer and making them harder to hunt.

“It hurts the heart,” he tells Campbell as they drive out to the ice sheet that holds eight per cent of the world’s fresh water.

Greenland’s melting season starts earlier and finishes later than it used to. So the speed of the melt has doubled, adding to sea levels.

“If you were to melt the whole Greenland ice sheet here, we’re talking about seven metres’ sea level rise,” says local climate scientist Thomas Juul-Pedersen.

Some Greenlanders would rather see an upside to climate change. In Greenland’s only inland town Kangerlussuaq, Campbell meets 13-year-old Athena. She laments the cold and boring Arctic winters.

“It would be nicer to be warmer. Yeah, I could use some of that,” she says.

On Top of the World, a spectacularly filmed journey to the ground zero of global warming, airs on Foreign Correspondent at 8.30 pm Monday January 29 on ABC TV (repeated 1 pm Tuesday and 11.30 pm Wednesday on ABC TV; 8 pm Saturday and 1 am Sunday on ABC News). Also on iview. This is the last episode of Foreign Correspondent’s current season.

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