



The management of Hector's and Maui's dolphins

Fact Sheet November 2013

Background

Hector's and Maui's dolphins are among the world's rarest and smallest dolphins. They are an inshore coastal species with a limited home range, occurring only in New Zealand's waters. Maui dolphins inhabit the West Coast of the North Island, and the Hector's live in three geographically distinct groups around the South Island.

The New Zealand Government is looking at ways to ensure the long-term future of Hector's and Maui's dolphins.

A whole-of-government approach is being taken to reduce the risks to the dolphins. This includes planning, monitoring and commissioning research to ensure invested money is utilised efficiently.

The Maui and Hector's Dolphin Threat Management Plan (TMP) guides management approaches, jointly led by the Department of Conservation (DOC) (for non-fishing-related impacts) and the Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) (for fishing-related impacts).

The TMP looks at all human-induced threats including fishing, vessel traffic, mining, construction, coastal development, pollution, sedimentation, oil spills, and any other contributing factors.

In light of a new population estimate and the accidental capture of either a Maui's or Hector's dolphin off the coast of Taranaki in January 2012 (there is no certainty over what the dolphin actually was), the review of the Maui's dolphin section of the TMP was given high priority by the Government, and brought forward to 2012.

Responsive management

Successive governments have been responsive as new information about Hector's and Maui's dolphins has become available.

The first protective measures for Maui's dolphins were put in place in 2002.

In response to new information about the dolphins, the TMP was developed and implemented in 2008. The TMP enables a whole-of-government approach to the management of the dolphins, and incorporates monitoring and research programmes, to test the effectiveness of the protective measures put in place.

For Maui's dolphins, there are now a range of fishing and other restrictions that extend across the entire area where they are most commonly found. The best-available information based on sightings indicates the areas where Maui's dolphins are most commonly found occur within seven nautical miles from shore.

For Hector's dolphins, the areas that pose the greatest risk to the Hector's population are also covered by various fishing bans and restrictions.

Combined, the areas covered by restrictions on set netting (the fishing method known to pose the greatest risk), have increased by more than 600 percent between 2003 and 2012. Almost 15,350 square kilometres of the coastal environment is closed to set net activity.

Protective measures to avoid dolphin mortality from trawling activities have increased from 0 in 2003, to 6335 square kilometres in 2012.

MPI estimated that the economic impact on the inshore fishing sector of the measures over time would be approximately \$80 million.

In 2012, after a Hector's or Maui's dolphin mortality resulting from set net activity was reported in an area outside of the closures implemented by MPI, a closure out to two nautical miles offshore was put in place.

DOC has also implemented five marine mammal sanctuaries surrounding key dolphin habitats.

The Minister for Primary Industries and Minister of Conservation instructed their agencies to bring forward the review of the Maui's dolphin portion of the TMP to determine whether existing protective measures remained sufficient to ensure the future of the dolphins.

Contribution of the inshore fishing sector

Fishing is a significant contributor to the New Zealand's economic, social and customary landscape.

The inshore finfish industry provides a significant economic contribution to local and national economies. It contributes export earnings of more than \$120 million a year and has a quota value of more than \$810 million. Seafood New Zealand estimates that the inshore fishery (including shellfish) operates with around 1200 vessels and directly employs around 3000 crew throughout many communities. These employment figures do not include the many associated industries servicing the fishery.

The inshore commercial finfish industry generally operates within 12 nautical miles from shore. Often the species being targeted, and the small vessels used for inshore fishing (2-3 crew per boat are common), means fishing usually occurs within sight of land.

Investment in better information

MPI and the commercial fishing industry are investing significantly to gain a better understanding of the fishing-related risks to Hector's and Maui's dolphins.

MPI and the commercial fishing industry are jointly funding an extensive monitoring programme to assess impacts of inshore fishing on protected species. A key objective of the programme is to assess the effectiveness of measures to reduce the impact of fishing on Hector's and Maui's dolphin populations. The programme puts observers on board commercial fishing vessels in areas where there may be an overlap between fishing and protected species.

MPI and the commercial fishing industry (through cost recovered levies) have invested more than \$3.8 million in this programme since 2008.

MPI is also funding an observer programme costing between \$300,000 and \$500,000 per year covering all commercial set net boats operating out of New Plymouth between two and seven nautical miles offshore, specifically to look for Maui's dolphins and observe any interactions that might occur.

A further \$500,000 has been dedicated to extensive research of the Hector's dolphin population inhabiting the East Coast of the South Island. The final results of this research will be available at the end of 2013.

In 2012, MPI and DOC also jointly funded an independent risk assessment of human impacts on Maui's dolphins. The risk assessment was conducted by world-leading domestic and international scientists, and chaired by the Royal Society of New Zealand. The results of the assessment have been used to inform the review of the Maui's dolphin portion of the Threat Management Plan which was finalised in November 2013.

DOC maintains records of public sightings of Maui's and Hector's dolphins. DNA samples are collected when a Hector's or Maui's dolphin is found dead and the animal is sent away for a necropsy. This information can tell us a lot about the species. DOC and MPI also support, or are involved in, research led by external research providers, for example the revised abundance estimate for Maui's dolphins.

Compliance and enforcement

MPI is committed to and is serious about enforcing all fishing related regulations, including those aimed at protecting endangered species.

Fishing in closed areas, using prohibited fishing methods or improper use of gear incur harsh penalties, including loss of gear and/or significant fines.

MPI has established and promotes the free hotline 0800 4 POACHER, for members of the public to anonymously report suspected violations of fishing regulations or improper use of gear.

MPI also publicises a recreational set net Code of Practice that promotes good netting practice.