

Further information

See www.doc.govt.nz/marinemammals for more information or phone your local DOC Office.

Research

There is still a lot that we don't know about Māui dolphins.

- ▶ Can the population recover, and how quickly?
- ▶ What species are most important to them for food?
- ▶ How will they be affected by increasing human use of their home range (such as marine mining, seismic surveying, marine construction)?
- ▶ Are there ways we can mitigate impacts of disease?

DOC, together with university researchers and conservation groups, is seeking answers to these questions using a range of research methods and techniques. You can help this research by reporting sightings of Māui dolphins (see back panel).

West Coast North Island Marine Mammal Sanctuary

The sanctuary establishes restrictions on set net fishing and seabed mining in some areas and on seismic activities throughout, as these are known to be potential threats to the dolphins.

Refer to the DOC website

<https://www.doc.govt.nz/mauidolphin>

for current maps and information regarding Māui dolphins, the West Coast North Island Marine Mammal Sanctuary and associated restrictions.

The Sanctuary extends from Maunganui Bluff in Northland to Oakura Beach in Taranaki, and extends 12 nautical miles offshore.



How you can help

If you see Māui dolphins when out on the water:

- ▶ Avoid approaching Māui's dolphins and never swim with them.
- ▶ Ensure there are no more than three vessels (including jet skis and kayaks) within 300 m of a pod.
- ▶ Keep your speed to a minimum – no wake allowed within 300 m.
- ▶ Do not feed Māui dolphins or dump rubbish, and keep noise to a minimum.
- ▶ Report any sightings of Māui's dolphins to the DOC HOTline 0800 362 468 . Include the location (GPS coordinates if possible), number seen, time, date and photos showing landmarks if possible.
- ▶ If you see set nets within the closed areas, phone: 0800 4 POACHER (0800 47 62 24) or 0800 DOCHOT (0800 362 468).



Māui dolphins

Saving one of the ocean's rare treasures

Māui's dolphin: Martin Stanley

Cover: A Māui dolphin between Manukau Head and Pork Waikato. Photo: M. Oremus and Martin Stanley

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On the edge of extinction

New Zealand's rarest dolphin, the Māui dolphin, is on the edge of extinction. With fewer than 100 left, this small, round-finned dolphin needs all our help to survive.

A ban on set netting and trawling along part of the North Island's west coast, together with more stringent controls over petroleum and mineral prospecting and mining, are big steps forward to help protect Māui dolphins.

Research is being undertaken to find out more about these dolphins. You can help by keeping an eye out for Māui dolphins and reporting sightings (see overleaf).

Why so special?

Māui dolphins (*Cephalorhynchus hectori māui*) are found on the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand, and nowhere else in the world.

This small population of dolphins is thought to have been isolated from their more numerous relatives, South Island Hector's dolphin, approximately 16,000 years ago. They are separate subspecies that look very similar but are genetically distinct from each other.

Māui's dolphins are classified as Nationally Critical, the highest 'at risk' classification in the New Zealand Threat Classification System. They are also listed as Critically Endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).



Adult and juvenile Māui dolphins. Photo: Martin Stanley

Like the kiwi, the Māui dolphin is an important part of New Zealand's natural heritage. If we don't act now, this endemic dolphin will be lost forever.

This means there is a high risk of the Māui dolphin becoming extinct in the near future.

Like the kiwi, the Māui dolphin is an important part of New Zealand's natural heritage. If we don't take care, this endemic dolphin will be lost forever.

About Māui dolphin

Appearance

Māui and Hector's dolphins are the smallest of the world's 32 dolphin species. Females grow to just 1.7 metres and weigh up to 50 kilograms, while males are slightly smaller.

These two species look different to other dolphins. They are the only New Zealand dolphins with a rounded black dorsal fin and black flippers, tail and eye patches. Other dolphins usually have a sickle-shaped fin.

Range

Māui dolphins are generally found close to shore in groups or pods of several dolphins. They are often seen in water less than 20 metres deep but may also range further offshore. We know that they use the mouths of the Manukau and Kaipara harbours, and are often seen just outside many other harbours on this coast. Studies suggest that individual dolphins generally use about 30 km of shoreline, but some individuals have been recorded moving nearly 80 km in under three weeks!

Historical samples indicate Māui dolphins inhabited the New Plymouth and Taranaki regions as recently as 1989, but most sightings now occur between Auckland's west coast and Raglan.

Declining numbers

Māui dolphins are known to live up to 20 years. Females are not sexually mature until 7 to 9 years old, and produce just one calf every 2 to 4 years. This means any population increase is slow. Recent studies show the number of Māui dolphins has reduced since earlier surveys and may still be declining.

DOC surveys in 2010 and 2011 found that there were at least two South Island Hector's dolphins swimming among the Māui dolphins. It seems likely that they could interbreed, which may provide the Māui dolphins with a much-needed boost by increasing genetic diversity, but there is no evidence that this has occurred yet.

Threats and mitigation

There are natural and human-induced factors affecting Māui dolphins that need to be better understood.

Human-induced threats

The close inshore distribution of Māui dolphins overlaps with many coastal activities that pose a threat to their survival.

Māui dolphins are threatened by:

- ▶ becoming entangled in fishing gear and drowning, including from set netting, trawling and drift netting
- ▶ being hit by boats and their propellers
- ▶ becoming entangled in or ingesting marine litter (especially plastics)
- ▶ pollution
- ▶ the effects of marine mining and construction, including seismic surveys.

Set netting bans

Set netting poses a threat to Māui dolphins. Regulations under both the Fisheries Act 1991 and the Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978 now ban set netting along part of the west coast of the North Island.

See www.mpi.govt.nz/Fisheries and www.doc.govt.nz for maps outlining these restrictions.

Amateur fishermen found fishing with set nets in the closed area can be fined up to \$100,000 and fishing equipment can be seized. Fines for commercial fishermen are up to \$300,000 under the Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978. If you see set nets within the closed areas, phone:

0800 4 POACHER (0800 47 62 24)
or 0800 DOCHOT (0800 362 468).

Natural threats

Some other threats are beyond our control, but have significant effects due to the small population size of Māui dolphins. These include:

- ▶ disease
- ▶ predation from sharks and orcas (killer whales)
- ▶ extreme weather, which can cause mothers and calves to be separated, resulting in the death of the calf.

The review of the Māui's Dolphin Threat Management Plan provides further details on threats facing Māui dolphins and how the Department of Conservation and Ministry for Primary Industries are seeking to mitigate threats against them. See www.doc.govt.nz/tmp-review

