

Staff from the Department of Conservation and university research groups will carry out research to determine if Maui's dolphins are entering other North Island west coast harbours.

There is still much to be learned about Maui's dolphins. How far do they range? Where do they go in winter and at night? What is the ratio of females to males? Researchers will seek answers to these questions using a range of research methods and techniques, which may include visual surveys and satellite tagging.

Fisheries and Conservation staff will work with the lower Waikato River community to assess the potential threat from nets that are lost from the local drift net fishery inside the river delta. There is a risk that any lost nets swept out to sea may catch a Maui's dolphin. There is no information suggesting that Maui's dolphins are swimming into the Waikato River delta from the open sea, although they are seen frequently outside the river mouth.

A research programme involving observers is proposed to determine whether or not trawlers and Danish seine fishing are catching Maui's dolphins. These fishing methods are currently banned within one nautical mile of the coast, and two nautical miles of the seaward side of the harbour entrances on the north-west coast.

You can help protect Maui's dolphins by:

- Reporting any sightings of dead Maui's dolphins immediately to the Department of Conservation by phoning 0800 DOCHOT (0800 36 24 68)
- Reporting any sightings of live Maui's dolphins by submitting a report to the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) sightings web page at <http://www.hectorsdolphin.org.nz/pages/submit.html>, or by phoning the WWF hotline: 0800 432 8677. Report the location, number of individuals, time and date of sighting. If possible, take a photograph of the dolphin (preferably showing the background coastline).
- Promptly reporting any set nets operating within the closed areas to DOC staff or Fisheries compliance officers, or by phoning 0800 4 POACHER (0800 4 76224).
- Being careful where and how you use set nets in any of the west coast North Island harbours. If dolphins are seen in the area, please remove your net from the water.
- Not attempting to swim with Maui's dolphins.
- Not throwing food out near the dolphins and ensuring that any plastic rubbish is taken back to shore for safe disposal.
- Using a 'no wake' speed for boats within 300 metres of dolphins.

Protection for critically endangered Maui's Dolphins



Photo: Kirsty Russell



Photo: Steve Dawson



Photo: Kirsty Russell

For more information contact:

- Ministry of Fisheries website: www.fish.govt.nz
- Department of Conservation, Private Bag 68908, Auckland, ph: 09 445 9634. Or visit the DOC website: www.doc.govt.nz

Due to the rarity of the North Island Hector's dolphins, most of these photographs are of South Island Hector's dolphins, which are similar in appearance.



Department of Conservation
Te Papa Atawhai



MINISTRY OF FISHERIES
Te Tauāwhaiti i ngā kōwhiri o Teangaroa



Pete Hodgson
MINISTER OF FISHERIES

Pete Hodgson



Chris Carter
MINISTER OF CONSERVATION

Chris Carter

We are pleased to be taking additional measures to protect the critically endangered Maui's dolphin population. The best available data suggests there may be as few as 100 to 150 of these magnificent creatures still alive - making them as rare and as precious as the kakapo. Maui's dolphins (formerly known as North Island Hector's dolphin) are found only on the north-west coast of the North Island between New Plymouth and Dargaville.

Unfortunately, Maui's dolphins are susceptible to entanglement in set nets used by recreational and commercial fishers. The Minister of Fisheries has had to weigh up the fishing opportunities that set netting provides against the survival of one of the world's rarest dolphins.

After a process of public consultation, with input from many people and organisations, the Minister of Fisheries has made two decisions. First, to ban commercial set netting within four nautical miles of the coast (excluding most harbour areas) from Maunganui Bluff (north of Dargaville) to Pariokariwa Point (north of New Plymouth). Second, to ban all amateur and commercial set netting in the Manukau Harbour entrance west of Puponga Point (Cornwallis), to a point 0.5 nm north of Kauri Point (eastern end of Big Bay), and then to Kauri Point.

We acknowledge that these decisions will affect a number of people: in particular, commercial fishers who fish on the open north-west coast and at the Manukau Harbour entrance and recreational fishers who set net at the Manukau entrance. While we regret the difficulties this may cause, the small size of the Maui's dolphin population is such that we must act now to prevent further deaths from this fishing method. Our hope is that New Zealanders will always be able to see these unique dolphins in their natural environment.

We would like to acknowledge the work that has been done on this issue by researchers, environmental organisations, tangata whenua, and the Northern Inshore Fisheries Company Ltd.

Background to the decision

In August 2001 the Minister of Fisheries, Pete Hodgson, made a decision to ban all set netting from Maunganui Bluff to Pariokariwa Point. This decision was set aside in early 2002 as a result of a legal challenge by commercial fishing interests, although the ban on amateur set netting remained in place.

After the court case the High Court agreed to a proposal from the Northern Inshore Fisheries Company Ltd and the Minister of Fisheries to close the area from outside the Manukau Harbour to near Kawhia (excluding the harbours) to commercial set netting within four nautical miles of the coastline. Research surveys showed the dolphins were most frequently seen in this area.

The Ministry of Fisheries initiated a new consultation process in April 2002 followed by the release of a management options paper. After extensive discussions with stakeholders and consideration of the available information, the Minister of Fisheries has decided in favour of the ban on set netting.

About Maui's dolphins

Maui's dolphin is the world's smallest dolphin and is found only in New Zealand waters. It is one of only four endemic New Zealand mammals. Maui's dolphins are mostly seen close to shore, and in summer they frequent shallow waters less than 20 metres in depth. Their characteristics include:

- Distinctive grey, white and black markings and a short snout. Maui's is the only dolphin with a well-rounded black dorsal fin.
- Females grow to 1.7 metres long and weigh up to 50 kg. Males are slightly smaller and lighter.
- 20 year known maximum lifespan.
- Females are not sexually mature until seven to nine years of age. They produce just one calf every two to four years, making population recovery a very slow process.
- Like other dolphins, Maui's use echolocation to find their food. They send out high frequency 'clicks' that bounce off surrounding objects and fish, giving the dolphins a detailed picture of their surroundings. However, it seems that they may not be able to readily detect the presence of synthetic set nets.
- Pods usually consist of up to five dolphins and are generally found inshore from spring till autumn, before possibly moving further out to sea during winter.

All Hector's dolphins are known to Maori by several names, including Tutumairekurai, Aihe, Papakanua, Upokohue, Tukuperu, Tupoupou, and Hopuhopu.

Why Maui's dolphins are special

The small, critically endangered population of Maui's dolphins found only on the west coast of the North Island is thought to have been geographically separate from South Island Hector's dolphin populations for thousands of years. Recent research has found that Maui's dolphin and the South Island Hector's dolphin are separate subspecies, physically and genetically distinct from each other.

The threat from set netting

Set net fishing poses a major threat to Maui's dolphins. Like all marine mammals they need to breathe air to survive, which means that they must surface regularly. If they become tangled in set nets, they drown. Other threats to their survival include marine pollution and boatstrikes.

In the past 20 months, six dead Maui's dolphins have been recovered. Two were found in nets, two others showed signs of having been entangled in nets. The remaining two were too decomposed to determine the cause of death.

What's changing?

First, commercial set netting will be prohibited (recreational set netting is already banned) within four nautical miles of the coast (excluding most harbour areas) from Maunganui Bluff (north of Dargaville) to Pariokariwa Point (north of New Plymouth). Second, all set netting will be banned in the Manukau Harbour entrance west of Puponga Point (Cornwallis), to a point 0.5 nm north of Kauri Point (eastern end of Big Bay), and then to Kauri Point. These decisions will be implemented by fisheries regulations.

Who's affected?

The bans will affect some commercial fishers and a number of recreational fishers who set net at the Manukau Harbour entrance.

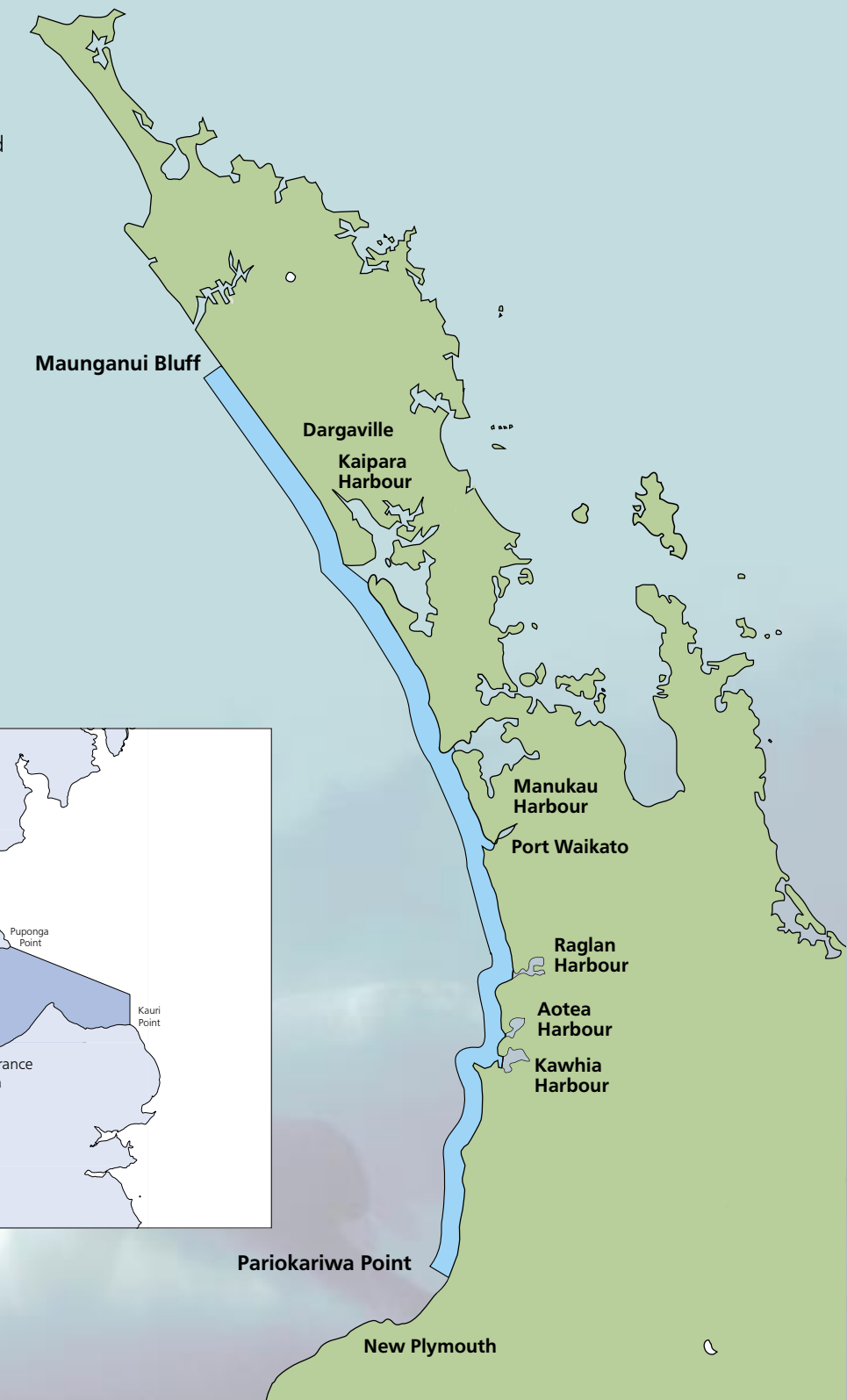
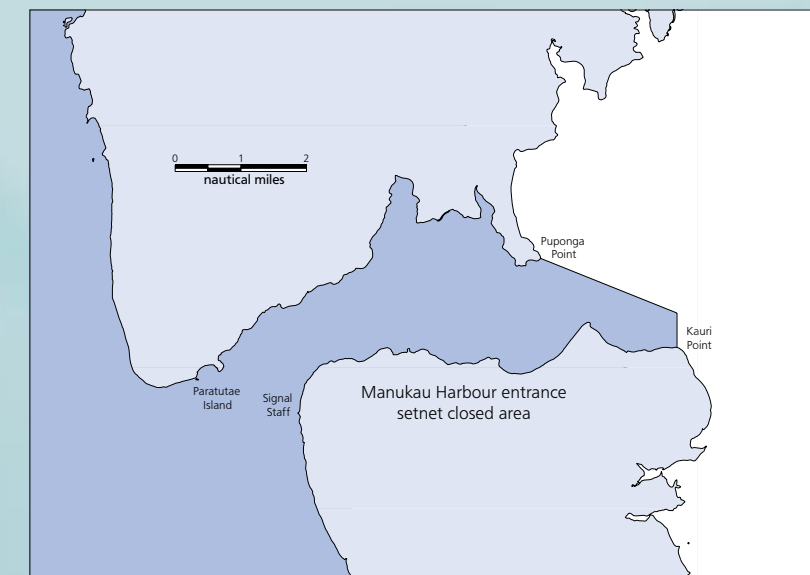


Illustration: Madeleine Trusewich (aged 7)



Rare Maui's dolphins. Photo: Kirsty Russell