

Maui's dolphin

New Zealand's rarest dolphin, Maui's dolphin (formerly known as North Island Hector's dolphin), is on the edge of extinction.

With less than 150 left in the wild, this small, round-finned dolphin needs all our help to survive.

A ban on set netting along part of the North Island west coast and the Manukau Harbour entrance is a big step forward to help protect Maui's dolphin.

Research is being undertaken to find out more about these dolphins. People who visit or use the west coast can help by keeping an eye out for Maui's dolphins and reporting sightings (see over).

Why so special?

Maui's dolphin is found only on the west coast of the North Island of New Zealand and nowhere else in the world.

The dolphin is listed internationally as 'critically endangered', which means there is a high risk of it becoming extinct in the near future.

This small population of dolphins is thought to have been isolated from their more-numerous relatives, South Island Hector's dolphin, for thousands of years.

Maui's dolphin (*Cephalorhynchus hectori maui*) used to be known as North Island Hector's dolphin. But recent research showed the North and South Island dolphins are separate sub-species that are physically and genetically distinct from each other.

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

Right: South Island Hector's dolphin look very similar to Maui's dolphin but is a separate sub-species.



Kirsty Russell



Steve Dawson



DOC

Karioitahi Beach, near Waiuku.

Threats

Set netting poses a major threat to Maui's dolphins. Like all marine mammals they need to come to the surface regularly to breathe. If they become tangled in nets, they asphyxiate and die.

Other threats to their survival are trawl fishing, being hit by boats, becoming tangled in marine litter (especially plastics) and pollution such as persistent organic pollutants and heavy metals.

A significant number of Maui's dolphins have been caught and killed in gill nets since 1987 when DOC began investigating dolphin deaths. This has prompted a ban on set netting in areas where the dolphins are commonly found.

Above left: Maui's dolphins between Manukau Heads and Port Waikato.

You can help to protect Maui's dolphin by:

Not using set nets in west coast harbours where Maui's dolphins are known to have been seen. If you do set nets and see dolphins, please lift your net from the water immediately.

Using a 'no wake' speed for boats within 300 metres of dolphins.

Not swimming with Maui's dolphins or throwing food near them.

Taking all plastic rubbish to shore for safe disposal.

Reporting sightings of Maui's dolphins to the WWF Sightings Network by phoning 0800 4 MAUIS (0800 462 847) or submitting a report on www.hectorsdolphin.org.nz. This information is shared with DOC.

Report the location, number of dolphins and date and time of sighting. If possible, take a photo with the shore in the background.

Reporting dead or stranded Maui's dolphins immediately to DOC, by phoning 0800 DOCHOT (0800 362468). Do not move the dolphin or any nets found in the area.

Contacting the Ministry of Fisheries on 0800 4 POACHER (0800 4 76224) if you see set nets within the closed areas.

See www.doc.govt.nz for more information or phone DOC Auckland Area Office (09) 445 9142.



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Set netting closed area

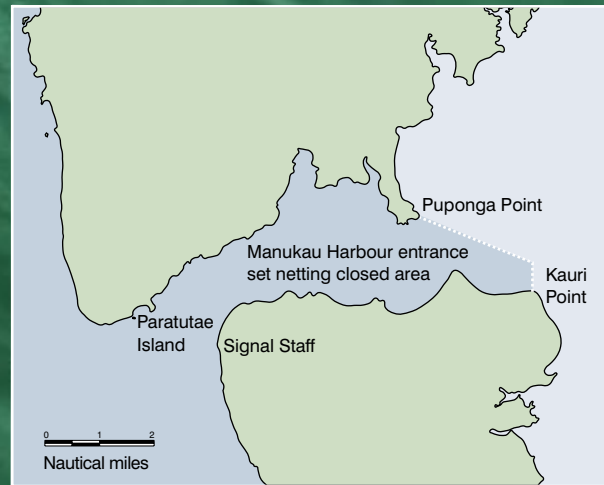


Photo: Kirsty Russell



Between Manukau Heads and Port Waikato.

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Protecting Maui's dolphin

Fisheries regulations now ban set netting within four nautical miles of the coast from Maunganui Bluff (north of Dargaville) to Pariokariwa Point (north of New Plymouth).

Set nets are also prohibited in the Manukau Harbour entrance west of Puponga Point at Cornwallis, to a point 0.5 nautical miles north of Kauri Point (eastern end of Big Bay) and back to Kauri Point.

Amateur fishers found fishing with set nets in the closed area are liable for a fine of up to \$20,000, plus seizure of their fishing equipment. Fines for commercial fishers are up to \$100,000.

If you see set nets within the closed areas please contact the Ministry of Fisheries on 0800 4 POACHER (0800 4 76224).

About Maui's dolphin

Maui's dolphin is 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.

Maui's and South Island Hector's dolphins look different to other dolphins. They are the only dolphins with a rounded black dorsal fin and a black tail, flippers and eye patches. Other dolphins usually have a sickle-shaped fin.

The dolphins are known to live up to 20 years. Females are not sexually mature until seven to nine years old and produce just one calf every two to four years. This means any population increase is slow.

Maui's 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. Young dolphins usually stick close to their mother or another dolphin.

Recent studies show the range of Maui's dolphins has reduced since earlier surveys, with most sightings of dolphins now between the Manukau Harbour and Port Waikato.

Like other dolphins, Maui's use echolocation to find their food. They send out high frequency 'clicks' that bounce off objects and fish, and give the dolphins a picture of their surroundings. This sonar is not used all the time, which may be why the dolphins get caught in nets.

Maui's and South Island Hector's dolphins are known to Maori by several different names, including Tutumairekurai, Papakanua, Upokohue, Tupoupou and Hopuhopu.



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Research

There is still much we don't know about Maui's dolphins.

Do they frequent harbours other than the Manukau? How far do they travel offshore and along the coast? How are pollutants and diseases affecting the dolphins? Can the population recover, and how quickly?

The Department of Conservation, Ministry of Fisheries, university researchers and conservation groups are seeking answers to these questions using a range of research methods and techniques.

The public has a part to play in this research by reporting sightings of Maui's dolphins.