Stakeholder representatives of the Maui Research Advisory Group: 
Angeline Greensill (iwi/hapū representative of the Whaingaroa area) 
Anton van Helden (Forest and Bird) 
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15 March 2018 

Request from the members of the Māui Dolphin Research Advisory Group for report-back at the MRAG meeting on the 26th March 2018

Dear Government representatives and organisers of the Maui Research Advisory Group,

We have produced this document in order to highlight the important topics that we wish to discuss at the upcoming MRAG meeting on the 26th March in Auckland. We are keen to ensure the MRAG meeting is as productive as possible, which is why we hope this document will enable you to pull information together and report-back at the meeting on these priority issues:

- Observer coverage on WCNI
- Compliance and enforcement
- Scope of the threats included in the risk assessment
- Including the Hectors-Māui corridor in the risk assessment
- Use of public sightings and fisheries observer sightings
- Other science needed to inform the development of TMP management options

**Observer coverage on WCNI**
- If observer coverage is not 100%, what are the major difficulties/challenges?
- How do you know where the boats fish? GPS positioning of trawl or set nets? Is trawl positioning data incomplete i.e. just the start points are recorded? How do we know boats don’t trawl into the protected areas?
- How does MPI know that an observer is needed? When is MPI notified that a fishing trip will go into an area where an observer is needed? How often does MPI find out, after the fact, that an observer was needed?

**Compliance and enforcement**
There is anecdotal information (from WWF discussions with fishers, and local people on WCNI) that in some areas there is illegal fishing and black markets where fish is sold locally (and illegally), and that there is hardly ever (if ever) an MPI officer monitoring the area.

- How comprehensive is the compliance, monitoring and enforcement of the fisheries restrictions? How many officers monitor the fishing in the restricted areas? What is the coverage in different areas along the coast?
- What are the offence/compliance rates?
- How likely is non-compliance going to be picked up?
- What are the penalties for non-compliance and are these an effective deterrent?
**Scope of the threats included in the risk assessment**

We consider that the risk assessment should include:

- Independent assessment of the effect of sand mining on the North-South migration/passage of Hectors and Māui dolphins on the West Coast, and on the availability of forage fish (i.e. secondary effects on the marine ecosystem).
- Independent assessment of the threats from oil and gas mining including the non-lethal impacts from seismic surveying.
- Assessment of land based pollutants (other than toxoplasmosis) including toxins such as DDT and other endocrine disruptors washing into the sea from the Waikato River and other water ways.

**Including the Hectors-Māui corridor in the risk assessment**

We previously recommended (in our written comments following the 2016 MRAG meeting) that the scope of the risk assessment for Māui dolphins also include the Hectors that travel up the West Coast from the South, and the geographical region of this Hectors and Māui corridor. As we know from the most recent abundance survey, two Hectors are already resident within the Māui population, and any more that come north could provide extremely valuable genetic diversity into the Māui population if they were to breed. This genetic diversity would make the Māui population more resilient and improve its chances of recovery.¹ Therefore, we consider the Hectors on the WCNI to be a top priority for management and protection.

Consideration of threats to these Hectors on the WCNI will require looking at the threats in their path (i.e. in the corridor) such as seismic surveying and sand mining. There will need to be robust and independent assessment of the risks and threats in the Southern range of Māui dolphins and the Hectors-Māui corridor.

- Please report to us about how you are taking into consideration the Hectors on the SCNI and WCNI in the spatial distribution and risk assessment.

**Use of public sightings and fisheries observer sightings**

Public sightings through the DOC or WWF phone line and app are independently validated by the Cawthron Institute and given a validation score. Category three sightings are potentially the most interesting sightings (in terms of management implications) as they are considered to fit the description of Māui dolphins (or Hectors) but are outside the “known range”. Over the last few years there have been 9 category three sightings from WCNI Taranaki, 5 from WCNI Kāpiti (including Foxton), 4 from SCNI, and 10 from ECNI.

In our comments submitted September 2016, we encouraged the Government to carry out any statistical analysis on public sightings or fisheries observer sightings so that they could

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¹ “The northward dispersal of Hectors dolphins into the Māui dolphin population could lead to the genetic enhancement of Māui dolphins and promote the preservation of the species as part of the west coast North Island marine ecosystem.” (Hamner, R.M.; Constantine, R.; Oremus, M.; and Baker, S. ‘Long-range movement by Hector’s dolphins provides potential genetic enhancement for critically endangered Māui’s dolphin’, *Marine Mammal Science* 30(1) · January 2014, p.4.)
be incorporated into assessment of risks and distribution mapping for the next TMP. We recommended that this work be funded and done in an open and transparent process, in time to be useful for the risk assessment used to develop the 2018 TMP.

- Please report on the use of category three sightings in the new distribution maps. How has the data been groomed or analysed?
- Also, please provide an update on the how analysis of fisheries observer data is going.

Other science needed to inform the development of TMP management options

The Risk Assessment will be a very valuable basis to understand where the threats are, and their relative impact, which will help prioritise management action. The SEFRA tool will enable exploration of how risk can be reduced via spatial management. However, to enable Ministers to make management decisions for the new TMP, there is other research that would be valuable for the development of management options, including:

- Open and transparent analysis of economic costs of extending restrictions. Recent work by Business Economic Research Limited (BERL) provides a useful methodology for assessing costs, or at least a point of comparison for a different approach. Whichever approach is used, it must be open and transparent so that it can be independently assessed.

- Assessment of costs and benefits of spatial protections should include looking at the effects of spatial or temporal closures on other species and the marine environment; and the related social, cultural, economic benefits. Anecdotal evidence (from recent WWF discussions with recreational fishers, Iwi and hapū and local people on the West Coast North Island) shows that the spatial closures for Maui dolphins has resulted in healthier fisheries, more abundance of target species for recreational fishing in some areas. There have been social, cultural and economic benefits resulting from a healthier marine environment.

- Social/cultural/ economic research into options for fisheries transition out of Māui habitat or to dolphin safe gear. Spatial closures are the only option currently used to reduce fisheries threats, however there are other options that could enable fishing to continue such as gear switching. Research is needed to explore the options for switching to dolphin-safe gear. What are the main barriers to uptake of the options? How can the barriers be overcome? And at what cost? WWF-New Zealand has developed a detailed research proposal, which can be used in part or in full, or could be revised in order to develop some discrete work within MRAG budgets.

- Research into the ecological effects of a transition from net fishing to longlining on other protected species and fish stocks. The Department of Conservation has identified that gear switching from nets to longlining may have significant impacts on sea birds and other fish stocks, and that in order to explore and develop fisheries

transition options further, research to find out the scale of the potential impacts and whether impacts can be mitigated is required. The International Whaling Commission also identified this as an important area for research. The 2017 Report of the Working Group on Non-Deliberate Human-Induced Mortality of Cetaceans states: “The Working Group agreed that the evidence presented suggests that longlines are a potential alternative to reduce risk from the set nets and trawling currently associated with bycatch of Maui dolphin. Government support is required to develop and implement such alternatives and assess any associated impacts on target catch or other marine species.”3

We look forward to the meeting on the 26th of March and working with you towards our shared goal of better protecting Maui dolphins and preventing their extinction.

Kind regards,
MRAG members.

3 https://www.iucn.org/sites/dev/files/content/documents/wgwap_18-inf.7-j_sc_rs6557_annex_j_him-highlights.pdf