

Meeting Report: Hector's and Māui dolphin North Island Forum

Date: 27 October 2021

Time: 9.00 am – 1.00 pm

Location: MS Teams online meeting

Chair: Mara Wolkenhauer

Attendees: Kayla Rains (Northland Conservation Board), Shane Lavery (Auckland Conservation Board), Fiona Gower (Waikato Conservation Board), Patau Tepania (Te Roroa), Howard Reti (Ngātiwai), Arnold Maunsell (Mid-North Iwi Fisheries Forum), Hori Parata (Ngātiwai) (briefly), Kier Volkerling (Ngātiwai), Taruke Thompson (Motakotako Marae), Fiona Shaw (Ngaa Rauru Kaitahi), Ronald Takere (Marakopa Marae), Tamara Barlow (Te Roroa), Natasha Willison (Marakopa), Krista van der Linde (WWF), Christine Rose (Māui & Hector's dolphin Defenders), Jasmine Hunter (Whāingaroa Environment Centre), Stacey Hill (Whāingaroa Environment Centre), Andrew Stewart (Trans-Tasman Resources/Trident Exploration), Megan Carbines (Auckland Council), Ella Walsh (Auckland Council), Hannah Jones (Waikato Regional Council), Richard Griffiths (Northland Regional Council), Thomas McElroy (Taranaki Regional Council), Rochelle Constantine (University of Auckland), Karen Stockin (Massey University), Jim Roberts (Independent), Scott Baker (Oregon State University), Debbie Steele (Oregon State University), Tane van der Boon (Māui63), Pierre Tellier (Ministry for the Environment), Peter Longdill (Sanford), Trish Rea (NZ Sport Fishing Council/LegaSea), Ken Barry (NZ Sport Fishing Council), Tamar Wells (Te Ohu Kaimoana), Jesse Rihia (Te Ohu Kaimoana), Rosa Edwards (Fisheries Inshore NZ), Kristina Hillock (DOC), Anton van Helden (DOC), Dave Lundquist (DOC), Katie Clemens-Seely (DOC), Tom Chatterton (FNZ), Steve Halley (FNZ), Ben Sharp (FNZ), Noel Martin (FNZ), Elizabeth Heeg (DOC), Emma Taylor (FNZ), Cara Hansen (DOC), Heidi Kikillus (MPI), Hannah Hendriks (DOC).

Purpose:

- Gather input and undertake discussions on progress in implementing the Hector's and Māui Dolphin Threat Management Plan (TMP).
- Provide a platform through which DOC and Fisheries New Zealand can communicate annual plans and proposals to achieve the TMP objectives.
- Facilitate the exchange of information, concerns, ideas, and perspectives.

Time	Focus
9:00 am	Karakia and opening comments from Elizabeth Heeg (Director Aquatic, DOC) and Emma Taylor (Director Fisheries Management, Fisheries NZ). <ul style="list-style-type: none">• General context for the meeting, background for the Hector's and Māui Dolphin Threat Management Plan, statutory framework under which DOC and Fisheries NZ operate to protect the dolphins.• DOC and Fisheries NZ work closely to manage the threats to the dolphins.• Acknowledgement of the social cost of the protection measures put in place for the dolphins.• Purpose of the Forum: what is in scope and out of scope of the Forum.
9:20 am	Introductions from participants.
10:00 am	Recap of new measures implemented in 2020 (Steve Halley, Manager Dolphin TMP, Fisheries New Zealand).

	<p>Q. Is there is a way to measure the effect of the South Taranaki Bight 2020 fisheries closures on the dolphin population, and whether they're successful?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not possible to directly measure the effectiveness of reducing the risk of a very low probability event.
10:30 am	<p>Updated Māui dolphin abundance estimate (Rochelle Constantine, University of Auckland).</p> <p>Q. Is eDNA an option instead of using biopsy for abundance estimates?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - eDNA is challenging to use in the marine environment as it disperses very quickly. The DNA is poor quality and not suitable for population estimates. The DNA obtained from eDNA is mitochondrial DNA, and it's extremely difficult to obtain any nuclear DNA using this method, which is what we need for abundance estimates. Also, eDNA samples can't determine individual dolphins. <p>Q. What work is going into researching the impacts of trawling on Māui dolphin habitat?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - There is an opportunity to potentially study the effects of removing trawl pressure from the newly protected zones within Māui dolphin habitat. This may help us understand what effects trawling may have on other factors that could affect the dolphins e.g. prey availability, how structural habitat might affect predation effectiveness. This is something that has been put up to initiate in the next couple of years. <p>Q. Why was Mokau not included in the abundance estimate sampling?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We do survey as far south as Mokau once or twice each survey year, but it's very rare that a dolphin would be seen there, let alone close enough to the boat to get a biopsy sample. However, we do have reported sightings and acoustic detections from that area.
11.30 am	<p>Hector's and Māui dolphin Research Strategy (Anton van Helden, Science Advisor Marine Species, DOC).</p> <p>Q. Are the risks to the dolphins ranked in the research strategy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No. Risks were ranked during the TMP review process (risk assessment). For the research strategy we ran a process to prioritise information gaps and research. <p>Q. Why hasn't the risk of vessel strike been addressed in the TMP?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vessel strike (along with some other threats) is managed under other legislation, e.g., Resource Management Act 1991, Marine Mammals Protection Act 1978, Marine Mammals Protection Regulations 1992. <p>Q. Why hasn't toxoplasmosis been included in the Research Strategy?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Toxoplasmosis is the subject of a separate research strategy as this will need to cover research areas beyond the dolphins and the marine environment, e.g., freshwater, terrestrial and pest management. The plan is currently in draft.

12.00 pm	<p>Fisheries monitoring (Tom Chatterton, Principal Advisor – Dolphin TMP, Fisheries New Zealand).</p> <p>Q. Will the increase in snapper quota increase fishing effort within the Māui dolphin habitat?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - When making the decision to increase the catch limits for the west coast snapper fishery, the Minister took into consideration impacts to protected species, including seabirds and Māui dolphins. The extensive new measures that came into effect in October 2020 significantly increased fishing restrictions in Māui dolphin habitats. The new measures provide a high degree of certainty that the current Fisheries related risk to Māui dolphin is close to zero. <p>Q. Does the commercial trawl prohibition also restrict customary quotas being obtained by a commercial trawler within the closed area?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Customary fishing is authorised via kaitiaki and can take place on commercial vessels under specific authority, which can include trawl vessels. However, kaitiaki are aware of the risks of authorizing customary take of a species that may be harvested using a particular method and generally choose to exercise the ability to authorise harvest outside of areas that are closed to that method, or to restrict the method that may be used to harvest the species. <p>Q. During the onboard camera trial (with the review of hundreds of hours of footage), were there any Māui dolphin incidents observed?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No. <p>Q. Has covid resulted in a reduction of observer coverage within the Māui dolphin area?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Within the Māui dolphin core area trawlers can't operate within the 4-7 nm area without an observer or camera. Outside of this area trawlers can operate without an observer, but some do have cameras, and all have GPS. In the 2019/20 observer year 70% of the planned observer days were delivered. In part this shortfall was a result of the covid lockdowns, for example during the April 2020 Level 4 lockdown there was only a very small number of days observed. However, a number of the trawl vessels had on-board cameras and a total of 71.5% of all trawl effort in the Māui habitat zone was monitored. The zone was not established until October 2020, so observer planning did not formally take the zone into account when determining location of observer coverage. <p>Q. With regards to delays between obtaining camera footage and review of that footage, is there a best practice timeframe?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The current delay is around 4-6 weeks. <p>Q. Are observers also recording sightings of dolphins?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, this is a key task of the observers, to record sightings of protected species. For inshore fisheries they check at regular intervals around the vessels for protected species and carry out ad hoc observations. If an observer sights a Māui dolphin, they log the time and position that they saw it, and try to photograph it.
12.30 pm	<p>Incident reporting (Kristina Hillock, Technical Advisor Marine Species, DOC)</p>

	<p>Q. How many iwi does DOC have pre-existing agreements with regarding strandings and retrieving dead Hector's and Māui dolphins?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This will be different for each area and rests with local DOC offices. Most offices will have good proactive arrangements and relationships, especially where there is a history of marine mammal incidents.
12.40 pm	<p>Toxoplasmosis update (Elizabeth Heeg, Director Aquatic, DOC)</p> <p>Q. How can we accelerate the toxoplasmosis work given the critical nature of this threat to the dolphins?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Its important that we get a coordinated and informed approach to the issue, which is very complex. We also have needed to establish where action that would help to manage toxoplasmosis is already underway, how we might leverage that existing action and the best way to proceed. <p>Comment: It feels like the risk of toxoplasmosis has been somewhat neglected when compared to that from fisheries. For example, around 80% of this forum meeting has focused on fisheries and very little on toxoplasmosis, despite the statements that fishing risk to Māui dolphins has largely been reduced and the existing narrative that toxoplasmosis is now the biggest remaining risk.</p> <p>Q. Is toxoplasmosis a feral cat issue, or a domestic cat issue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Its likely both, but this is still largely an unanswered question. <p>Q. Is the lack of knowledge in the toxoplasmosis space due to lack of funding, or some other reason?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It is partially a funding issue, and partly that as a research question it is difficult to tackle. <p>Q. Is this something that could be tackled by postgraduate researchers at universities?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, but we would also need to work with territorial authorities in terms of pest management strategies, and to look to willing partners from other organisations and sectors to start building momentum around the issues. <p>Q. Is this an issue that needs more research? We already know that feral cats are a big issue for the terrestrial environment. Isn't this something that could be dovetailed into existing predator control programmes such as Predator Free 2050, rather than going and doing more research?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DOC already does feral cat control on Public Conservation Land, but most of the Māui dolphin catchment (for example) is in private ownership, so we would need to work with those landowners to do pest control. Part of the reason cats weren't included in Predator Free 2050 is because feral cats are extremely difficult to control with existing tools because they're a very successful predator and difficult to trap. In addition, there is a social factor that needs a lot of work and consideration, particularly with owned and stray cats. <p>Comment: the toxoplasmosis versus Māui dolphin conversation has been going on for well over a decade, which is a long time for the world's rarest dolphin. Its not</p>

	<p>acceptable to leave the issue up to charitable funds. If this was a native bird there would be no end to the amount of money and effort put towards solving the issue. Huge amounts of money have gone into reducing the threat of fishing to the dolphins, but we're still seeing fisheries dominating the narrative. As a challenge to DOC – dissolve the land/sea interface within the organisation, provide adequate funding, and enable and empower local Māori to get on and apply mātauranga to tackle this problem.</p> <p>Q. Are DOC looking to control prey toxoplasmosis vectors (rats and mice) as a way to reduce toxoplasmosis in cats?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This has been raised as part of the toxoplasmosis research plan. <p>Comment: Need to petition the government for a cat management Act as there is currently no legal way to control stray cats, which may be a big contributor to toxoplasmosis within the Māui dolphin range (large populations in urban areas, e.g. Auckland and Hamilton, with direct connection to the sea and Māui dolphin habitat via the Waikato River and Manukau Harbour).</p>
1.10 pm	Wrap up and meeting closed