

JA1125/1126/1145

ARC Chair Michael Lee
ARC Councillor Christine Rose
Auckland Regional Council
Private Bag 92 012
Auckland

Dear Michael and Christine,

Thank you for your letters received on 5, 10 and 16 April 2007 expressing your support for increased protection for Hector's and Maui's dolphins. The Prime Minister has referred Councillor Lee's letter received on 5 April to us for consideration, as the issues raised therein fall within the fisheries and conservation portfolios.

As the Ministers of Fisheries and Conservation, we share your concerns about Hector's and Maui's dolphins, and are working hard to ensure threats to the dolphins are managed effectively.

We welcome the Auckland Regional Council's initiative in organising a petition calling for greater protection for Maui's and Hector's dolphins. As you may be aware, the Department of Conservation and Ministry of Fisheries are working closely together to formulate a Hector's dolphin Threat Management Plan. The Plan is due to be completed this year and will address all known actual and potential threats to the dolphins, including fishing-related mortality, boat strike, pollution, mining and tourism impacts. The need for further restrictions to mitigate threats to Hector's and Maui's dolphins, including Marine Mammal Sanctuaries and set net bans, will be considered as part of the Threat Management Plan.

As part of the Plan's development, officials are currently seeking input from local stakeholders on ways to effectively mitigate human induced threats to the dolphins in each of the three main regions where South Island Hector's dolphins are present (east, west and south coasts of the South Island), and for Maui's dolphin on the west coast of the North Island. Information gathered in the regional process will assist the development of threat mitigation options, as well as analysis of costs and benefits of those options. We will consult on these in the Threat Management Plan public consultation process. We encourage you to participate in the regional process on the west coast of the North Island, and we will ask officials to contact you directly to discuss ways you can contribute.

Your petition calls for set net bans to be extended across Maui's dolphins' complete range. You will likely be aware that there is currently a commercial and recreational set net ban between Maunganui Bluff (north of Dargaville) and Pariokariwa Point (north of New Plymouth), to a distance of four nautical miles offshore. Set netting has also been banned in the Manukau Harbour entrance.

The area where these measures apply corresponds to the entire presently known range of Maui's dolphins. The range has been determined on the basis of aerial and boat based surveys and reliable public sightings.

The research project involving use of acoustic devices in the west coast harbours that has received publicity recently is part way through, and has not yet been subject to scientific peer review. Officials will work with the researchers to determine the accuracy of the data and how best to use it in the development of the Threat Management Plan.

Officials will carefully examine all the available information coming from the regional discussion process already underway, and subsequent wider consultation with the general public on options, before making a final decision on measures required.

We acknowledge the Auckland Regional Council's request to meet with us to discuss concerns about Hector's and Maui's dolphins. Our offices will respond to your request in the near future.

We can assure you that the conservation of both Hector's and Maui's dolphins is a high priority for this Government.

Yours sincerely

Hon Jim Anderton
Minister of Fisheries

Hon Chris Carter
Minister of Conservation

NB Please can you provide a copy of this letter to those additional ARC Councillors who have signed the petition.

Cc Jenni Vernon - Chair Environment Waikato, Andra Neeley – Deputy Chair Environment Waikato, John Cronin – Chair Environment Bay of Plenty, Mark Farnsworth – Chair Northland Regional Council, Peter Jensen – Deputy Chair Northland Regional Council, Michael Barnett – CEO Auckland Chamber of Commerce, John Law – Mayor of Rodney District Council (RDC), David Steele – Deputy Mayor of RDC.