

option4 Update #91

NZ Fishing News November 2007 edition

October 2007

Waves of discontent have been rolling around the coastline lately in response to the Department of Conservation and Ministry of Fisheries' Hectors and Maui Dolphin Threat Management Plan proposals. By the time you read this Update the submission deadline will be close (October 24th). Both departments will be preparing final advice for their Ministers in order to achieve management decisions by early December.

There are four main dolphin population areas, the North Island's west coast and the east, west and southern coasts of the South Island. In an effort to reduce human-induced mortality of dolphins four options have been proposed including the status quo. Other proposals range from partial bans on set-netting, drift netting and trawling to full prohibition. Marine Mammal Sanctuaries have also been proposed.

Since time immemorial fishermen have used nets to catch fish for food. A net poses minimal threat to anything aside from the target species when used properly. At three recent meetings around the Manukau Harbour it was obvious nobody wants to kill a Maui dolphin, the proposals were unjustified and feedback from other areas suggests this view is reflected elsewhere.

Everything in life is a balance of risk and there is no such thing as a risk-free existence. As confirmed during the Kahawai Legal Challenge, the Minister is obliged to adhere to the purpose of the Act, which is to provide for the sustainable utilisation of fisheries to enable people to provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing. Wellbeing was described by the High Court as "the state of people's health or physical welfare".

The Minister has to apply the environmental principles of the Act - to manage fisheries sustainably - while mitigating any adverse effects on the environment; conversely he has to enable people to meet their current and future needs.

DoC and MFish admit that the nature and extent of the threats is highly uncertain so the Fisheries Minister will have to balance the sustainable utilisation factors against the impacts of his decisions on people's wellbeing.

Intensifying the debate has been the publicity campaign spreading misinformation about the threats and calling for a nationwide set-net ban. Franklin District Council on the southern shores of the Manukau Harbour were one such body that originally supported an Auckland Regional Councillor's call for such a drastic measure. The FDC and other councils were convinced that a total prohibition was required to achieve sustainable management.

After representations from concerned locals the FDC has retracted their stance and now support the status quo for set-net fishing within the harbour, the trawling prohibition out to four nautical miles and the options regarding drift netting in the Waikato River.

Undoubtedly the Minister has a dilemma of weighing the sustainability and utilisation objectives of the Fisheries Act. Amateur and commercial fishers are encouraged to participate in the independent survey to measure what the potential impacts of the proposals are likely to be on their social, economic and cultural wellbeing. Contact Aranovus Research **NOW** on research@aranovus.com or call 09 6259002.