

### **option4 Update #93**

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Close encounters with dolphins are one of life's joys when at sea. Without exception fishermen have been expressing their concern for the survival of both Hector's and Maui dolphins over the past seven weeks as option4 and other fishing organisations have rallied to respond to the Department of Conservation (DoC) and Ministry of Fisheries' (MFish) Hector's and Maui Dolphin draft Threat Management Plan.

Not since the Shared Fisheries debate earlier in the year have we witnessed such unified calls for commonsense action from the authorities, based on assessing the real threats facing these taonga (treasures) of the sea.

Maui dolphins are found on the North Island's west coast and Hector's dolphins around the east, west and southern coasts of the South Island.

South Island fishers have been struggling to convince authorities that Hector dolphin numbers have been increasing, not decreasing as some of the 'science' has alleged. There is a marked reluctance to accept anecdotal evidence of this.

Northern fishers have maintained that the most serious threat to the ongoing viability of Maui dolphin would be to ignore the real issues and introduce measures that will do little or nothing to protect them from further decline. The actual cause of mortality needs to be properly determined and addressed.

Why are we even discussing imposing fishing restrictions when the real cause of Maui mortality has not been identified?

Political lobbying and the importation of 'green dollars' from international conservation organisations to convince the public these dolphin are on the verge of extinction due to the use of nets has clouded the debate. The evidence simply does not support these allegations.

For centuries Maori and non-Maori have used nets to fish for food and commerce. When used properly, nets are the most efficient way to target species that are not easily caught using other methods; these include flounder, mullet, butterfish (greenbone) and moki.

If, as some have suggested, the decline of dolphins has coincided with the introduction of monofilament nets then a study into the dolphin's sonic perception of multi-filament (string) nets should be a priority. A solution that enables net detection and thus aversion would be a win-win for both mammal and humans.

MFish has maintained they have no preference for any of the options in the draft management plan. The reality is that both DoC and MFish will be providing their respective Ministers with advice to assist in the decision-making process and decisions will be made quickly - by early December.

As confirmed during the Kahawai Legal Challenge, the Minister of Fisheries must manage fisheries sustainably, avoid adverse effects on the environment and provide sufficient abundance of fish to enable people to provide for their social, economic and cultural wellbeing.

Any changes in access, fishing methodology and availability will have major implications for commercial, customary and traditional fishers. Let's hope the public servants in DoC and MFish remind the Ministers of their statutory obligations, it's what option4 and others have strongly

advocated in their submissions. Visit [http://www.option4.co.nz/Fisheries\\_Mgmt/dolphins.htm](http://www.option4.co.nz/Fisheries_Mgmt/dolphins.htm) to read more.