FACTSHEET

Dolphin Details

Why are they special?
Hector's and Maui's dolphins are New Zealand's only endemic dolphin species - that means they are not found anywhere else on planet Earth.

Maui's dolphins are a genetically separate subspecies of Hector's dolphins and are the rarest marine dolphin in the world with an estimated population of only 55 individuals over the age of 1 year. They are on the brink of functional extinction as a species – that means, while individuals may still be around for a few years, the species itself could die out within a generation. They are listed by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) as *critically endangered*.

The Hector's population is estimated at 7270 animals – which also puts it among the world's most rare dolphin species. The IUCN ranks Hector's as *endangered.*

What do those labels mean?
Critically endangered means Maui's face an 'extremely high risk of extinction'. To put it in context, the IUCN only has two more serious categories - *Extinct* and *Extinct in the Wild*.

Endangered means Hector's face a 'very high risk of extinction'.

Where do they live?
Although the species once ranged throughout New Zealand's coastal waters, today Hector's live around the South Island, and Maui's live along the North Island's west coast.

Why are they at risk?
Hector's and Maui's dolphins live close to shore, which places them at great risk from fishing – specifically, drowning after becoming entangled in commercial and amateur set nets and inshore trawl nets. Boat strikes, seabed mining (including seismic surveys), coastal development and pollution are additional threats.

Both species only live about 20 years, and are slow breeders. That means any human-induced deaths have a huge impact. Females begin breeding at age 7-9 and have one calf every 2-3 years. This 2% rate of growth means a population of 100 Hector's would grow to 102 (at most) in a year.

What is the main threat?
Bycatch in fishing gear, particularly gill nets and trawl nets, is the most serious threat for Hector's and Maui's populations.

Are they healthy animals?
Like dolphin populations all over the world, Hector's and Maui's dolphins have diseases and parasites. One bacterium, *Brucella*, has been found in every dolphin species examined so far, including Hector's. It's a bit like the common cold in humans.

Dolphins have lived with these diseases and parasites for millions of years – what's changed is that our activities (especially fishing) are depleting dolphin populations to the point where they are now have less resilience to absorb the impacts of disease, climate change and other external factors. We can't stop dolphin diseases like *Brucella*, but we can easily stop dolphins dying in fishing gear.

Isn't enough being done already?
Two protected areas already exist; one off Banks Peninsula and one off the North Island west coast. However, both areas are too small, regulations are a confusing hodgepodge and there is too little monitoring and policing of regulations. In 2008, the Minister of Fisheries extended protection from fisheries bycatch. However, these measures are still insufficient to allow the species to recover. Dolphin deaths caused by fishing continue at unsustainable rates. Current management has not stopped the population decline.

Is there an answer?
The obvious solution is simply to use sustainable fishing methods throughout New Zealand waters – methods that don't kill protected species such as dolphins, seals and seabirds.

It's possible. New Zealand's fishers have made amazing progress to lower the number of seabird deaths, and WWF is now challenging the commercial fishing industry to do the same with other bycatch species.

Most types of fishing could continue, like using handlines, longlines, fish traps, trolling, and many other fishing methods – including those used by recreational fishers, such as angling, surf casting, trolling, and spear fishing. Surveys of recreational fishers show just 6% use gill nets – a very small proportion.

What are we asking for?
WWF-New Zealand is not asking fishers to stop fishing in the areas where Hector's and Maui's range – simply for them to change to methods which don't kill dolphins. That means:

- A nationwide total ban on gill nets.
- A ban on trawl fishing in waters less than 100 metres deep, in areas where Hector's and Maui's dolphins are found.
- Full protection for the dolphins across their entire current range, and for areas where they ranged in the past.

These actions would help protect the species and allow them to recover to historical numbers.

What does the future hold?
If it were possible to remove fishing methods that kill dolphins within the next few months, it would still take until about 2050 for the Hector's dolphin population to recover to half of its original population size. If it took 5–10 years to phase out these damaging fishing methods, recovery would be even slower.

To not do anything could well sign the death certificate for Maui's dolphins. Extinction is forever.

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For more information about Maui's and Hector's dolphins and how you can help stop their extinction, please visit www.wwf.org.nz.
