

Māui and Hector's Dolphins

Cephalorhynchus hectori māui

Hector's and Māui dolphins are known by other names, including Popoto, Tutumairekurai, Aihe, Papakanua, Upokohue, Tukuperu, Tupoupou and Hopuhopu.

Māui Dolphins

Quick Facts:

- They are found only on the west coast of New Zealand's North Island and are the smallest and rarest dolphins in the world, with a unique rounded dorsal fin.
- There are only about 60 Māui over the age of 1 year remaining.
- They have a shorter lifespan than other dolphins, only living till their mid-20s.
- Females typically give birth to their first calves between five – nine years of age and only have one calf every two – four years.
- They mainly communicate using clicks, which are so high-pitched humans can't hear them.
- Māui dolphins are closely related to Hector's dolphins – while they look identical they are genetically different.



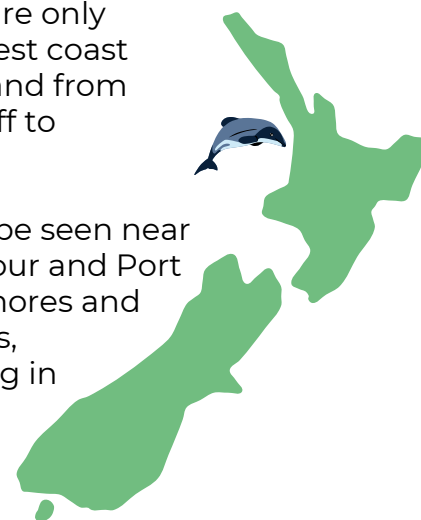
Photo: Steve Dawson

Current Situation:

- With short lifespans and decreasing reproduction rates, the Māui dolphins are classified as *Nationally Critical* species.
- Māui dolphins are currently capable of increasing their population by around 2% each year but with the increase of human-induced factors that are impacting their birth and mortality rates, they are highly at risk.

Habitat:

- Māui dolphins are only found on the west coast of the North Island from Maunganui Bluff to Whanganui.
- They can often be seen near Manukau Harbour and Port Waikato near shores and harbour mouths, generally staying in water that is less than 30m deep.



Threats to survival:

Both environmental and human factors are putting the Māui and Hector's dolphins at significant risk.

Environmental Threats:

- *Brucella abortus* is a pathogen caused by bacteria that can cause late pregnancy abortions. This was first identified in a Māui dolphin in 2006, and puts the already low population at risk.
- Toxoplasmosis is another parasitic disease that spreads through ingestion of infected meat or the ingestion of contaminated material. The main source of infection for dolphins is most likely through freshwater run-off from the land contaminated with cat faeces. Toxoplasmosis can cause death, behavioural changes, still births and reduced reproductive rates.
- Sharks such as great whites are the main predators for Māui dolphins and there have been several recorded incidents in which the sharks have been found with Māui dolphin remains in their stomachs.
- Changing weather patterns may also put Māui and Hector's at risk. The increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather patterns have been a possible reason for the separation of Hector dolphin calves from their mothers, resulting in the death of the calf. Similar effects may occur for the Māui dolphin.

Human Threats:

Pollution such as plastic debris, litter, metal toxins, oil spills, pathogens and organochlorines are also increasingly harming the Māui dolphin population.

Accidental entanglement in nets has been the largest cause of human related Māui dolphin deaths. Because Māui dolphins live just off the coast, fishing is a significant threat to their survival. Māui dolphins generally feed on bottom-dwelling fish and free-swimming prey and are often seen foraging around fishing boats using trawl nets, hunting the fish that have been disturbed by the trawlers. This can also lead to an increased risk of boat strike for the dolphins.



Photo: Silvia Scali

History:

- Before 2002, Māui dolphins were formerly known as the North Island Hector's dolphin due to their near identical look to the Hector's dolphin. They were later identified as a separate subspecies due to their slight genetic and physical differences, and were renamed Māui dolphin.
- The two subspecies are estimated to have been isolated from each other for 15,000 to 16,000 years.
- The earliest scientific documentation of the Māui dolphin was in the 1800's.
- They used to use estuaries, lagoons and rivers as important foraging areas but now the dolphins stick to the west coastline and harbours.

What Needs To Be Done

Urgent implementation of key measures, alongside strong legislative and community backing, is essential to save the critically endangered Māui dolphins and ensure the health of Aotearoa's marine ecosystems.

1. Expand Protected Areas and Fishing Bans

- Immediately extend marine protected areas to cover the entire Māui dolphin habitat out to 12 nautical miles.
- Ban both set net fishing and trawl fishing within this range to eliminate harmful practices in their critical habitat.

2. Sustainable Fishing Practices

- Reduce catch limits for commercial and recreational fishing within the Māui dolphin habitat to allow for an overall increase in marine bio-abundance, ensuring a healthier ecosystem for prey species.

3. Pollution and Habitat Health

- Undertake targeted research to better understand the impacts of pollution, toxins, and diseases on Māui dolphins, and develop strategies to mitigate these threats.
- Reduce the presence of plastic debris, toxins, and contaminants in their habitat to protect the dolphins and their food sources.

4. Addressing Broader Ocean Health

- Take strong action to combat climate change, a major factor affecting ocean health and the ecosystems Māui dolphins rely on.

5. Public Awareness and Reporting

- Encourage reporting of Māui dolphin sightings, illegal activities, and environmental hazards.
- Engage communities in monitoring and conservation efforts.

6. Monitoring and Research of Threats and Solutions

- Ongoing studies to assess the health, population dynamics, and risks faced by Māui dolphins.
- Invest in understanding how diseases and pollutants interact with other threats, and prioritise preventive measures

Māui Plushies

If you would like to order another Māui soft toy plushie please scan this QR code:



Help Save Māui and Hector's Dolphins!

What Can You Do?

- Support calls for Māui protected areas to be extended and for a ban on net fishing in the entire Māui habitat.
- Support a ban on bottom trawling
- Support a National Cat Act, so all domestic cats are microchipped and registered.
- Support practices to end feral cat populations and dispose of cat faeces in the bin not the toilet.
- Vote in elections to support sustainable policies.



Awhi Awa - Embrace a Stream!

Help take care of a waterway near you! Streams drain to the sea, and by improving freshwater streams, we can also enhance the habitats of Māui and Hector's dolphins. Purchase a kete and action pack here

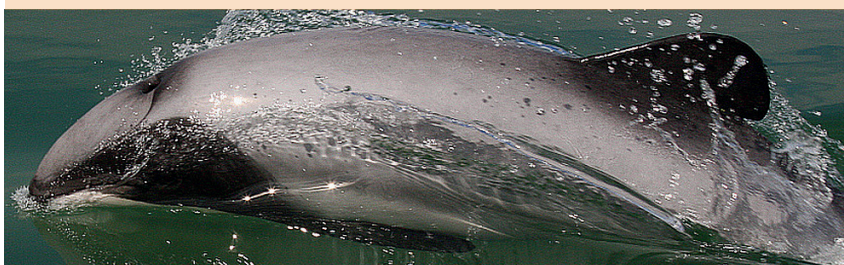


In Aotearoa New Zealand, there are strict rules for interacting with marine mammals like dolphins, whales, and seals to ensure their safety and wellbeing:

- Keep at least 50 metres away from dolphins, whales, and seals.
- Stay at least 200 metres away from any pod with a calf (baby marine mammals).
- Only three vessels are allowed within 300 metres of any marine mammal.
- Turn your engine to neutral or idle if a marine mammal approaches your boat.
- Do not swim with Māui or Hector's Dolphins or pods containing calves.

Rounded Fin - Ring it in!

Report Māui dolphin sightings - call 0800 DOC HOT (0800 362 468) or report via: www.doc.govt.nz/marine-mammal-sighting-form



Find out more and support much needed change for Māui Dolphins here:



www.endangeredspecies.org.nz/maui-dolphin