

Pathology Report

Submitter Ref.: H346	Date Sent: 21/08/2025	Accession No.: 65603
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To: [REDACTED]
Invercargill

Report Sent: 16/01/2026

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Species: Cetacean		Breed: Hector's Dolphin	
Age: Adult		Sex: Male	
Owner:		Type: Post Mortem	
ID: H346		Prev. Accn.:	
Submitted:	At Risk:	Affected:	Dead:

History

Reported by vessel. [REDACTED] Was on board for several days before vessel reached port. Frozen on arrival in Invercargill, held there until transport to Massey.

Gross Findings

This dolphin was received frozen and was thawed before necropsy. The body was in a good state of preservation, with no skin slippage, no scavenging and only mild discolouration of the intermandibular tissue (consistent with freeze/thaw artefact). Body condition was assessed as good, with a rounded lumbar profile and no concavity of the neck. Standard length = 1290mm; blubber depths = 13 dorsal, 13 lateral, 15 ventral. The teeth were in good condition with minimal wear. There were no notable nicks or tears to the flippers, fins, fluke or lips. Two short superficial lacerations were present on the right flank. The lungs were well inflated with mild bilateral rib impressions. No fluid or froth was present in airways. Occasional, small gritty foci (likely lungworm granulomas) were present in the lower lung lobes. The stomach contained numerous fish bones embedded in semi-digested fish flesh. The glandular compartment had several thickened eroded areas. There were very faint discontinuous white streaks (chyle) in the intestinal lymphatics. No gas bubbles were present. The summed testicular mass (with epididymis) was 314g.

Histopathology

Histology summary: All tissues are moderately affected by freeze/thaw artefact. There are a few granulomas in the lungs (consistent with lungworm lesions) and several areas of necrosis and inflammation in the thoracic lymph node (consistent with parasite migration tracks). There are developed spermatozoa in the seminal vesicles and epididymal ducts, indicating that this is a sexually mature male. No significant lesions are visible in any other tissues.

Provisional Diagnosis

Bycatch

Diagnosis

Bycatch

Comments

This male dolphin had several features consistent with bycatch: good body condition, recently ingested prey in the stomach, and no other grossly evident cause of death. We also tend to see nicks, tears and lacerations in the skin of bycaught Hector's dolphins, but the absence of these changes in the current case doesn't rule out bycatch as the cause of death.

In my estimation, the state of preservation of this dolphin is entirely consistent with it having drowned in the net of the vessel that returned it (i.e. several days dead on board, followed by freezing and then thawing of the body). I would also have expected to see some evidence of scavenging in a carcass that had died at sea before being entangled in a net; this was notably absent.

Detailed histological analysis was somewhat hampered by freeze-thaw artefact, but there were no lesions to suggest that this dolphin died of something other than drowning.

Date: 19/12/2025	Pathologists: [REDACTED]
Students:	