Meeting Report: North Island Hector's and Māui dolphin Forum

Date: 26 October 2023

Time: 9.00 am – 3.30 pm

Location: MS Teams online meeting

Facilitator: Rosemary Miller (DOC)

Attendees: Anton van Helden (DOC), Dave Lundquist (DOC), Kirstie Knowles (DOC), Tane Karepa (DOC), Rosemary Miller (DOC), Malene Felsing (DOC), Michelle Boyle (DOC), Rebekah Gee (DOC), Cameron Hunt (DOC), Cara Hansen (DOC), Ken Barry (NZ Sport Fishing Council), Davis Apiti (Ngati Te Wehi), Jordan Housiaux-Dustin (Ātiawa ki Whakarongotai), Tama Blackburn (Maniapoto), Timara Wallace (Te Kaahui o Rauru), Whakaotirangi Takawe Paki (mana whenua), Kylie Grigg (Te Ohu Kaimoana), Missy Love (Te Nehenehenui), Shane Lavery (Auckland Conservation Board), Pam Crisp (Wellington Conservation Board), Tamar Wells (Seafood New Zealand), Katie Goodwin (New Zealand Sport Fishing Council), Jesu Valdes (Taranaki Regional Council), Richard Griffiths (Northland Regional Council), Megan Carbines (Auckland Council), Eleanor Gee (Waikato Regional Council), James Griffin (Northland Regional Council), Sheree Judan (FNZ), Philip Heath (FNZ), Robert Win (FNZ), Marianne Lukkien (FNZ), John Richardson (FNZ), Howard Reid (FNZ), William Gibson (FNZ), Daniel Kerrigan (FNZ), Shelton Harley (FNZ), Christine Rose (Māui & Hector's dolphin Defenders), Carolyn Aguilar (WWF), Chelsea McGaw (Forest and Bird), Wendi Roe (Massey University), Liz Slooten (independent), Debbie Steel (Oregon State University), Scott Baker (Oregon State University), Jim Roberts (Independent), Keith Hernandez (Oregon State University), Rochelle Constantine (University of Auckland), Deanna Clement (Cawthron), Steve Dawson (Independent).

Purpose:

- To provide an overview of activities undertaken over the past year in relation to North Island Hector's and Māui dolphins.

Note this record seeks to reflect the views of DOC and FNZ over the flow of discussions, capturing key comments, suggestions, or criticisms to improve upon work within the TMP. It is not a verbatim record of all that was discussed. The various presentations are available on our website.

Time	Focus
9:00 am	**Karakia – Tane Karepa (DOC)** **Welcome and housekeeping – Rosemary Miller (DOC)** **Opening comments, context, and purpose – Kirstie Knowles (DOC) and Marianne Lukkien (FNZ).**
9:30 am	**Introductions and expectations from participants**
10:30 am	**Overview of progress against the TMP objectives, and update on last year's forum (Anton van Helden, DOC).** *Q. What does "thrive" mean in the context of the goals?* A. The wording from the TMP vision and goals came from discussions at various stakeholder forums during the review of the TMP in 2019. The general opinion amongst those stakeholders was that 'recovery' wasn't aspirational enough and the dolphins should be doing really well (thriving), rather than just recovering.

	Q. *What is the process for reporting on the goals of the TMP? How does this align with the deaths of Hector's dolphins we're seeing?* A. We have a range of reporting processes, depending on the threat being managed. For example, there is an annual fisheries monitoring report, annual review of the research prioritisation, and five-yearly abundance estimates of Māui dolphins. Q. *Is there a list of opportunities to apply for funding and resources for Mana Moana to contribute to the Māui Kaupapa?* A. We don't currently have a list but would like to meet with iwi to explore partnership opportunities. Comment: It would be great to have a portal for Māui dolphin information that can be accessed by everyone.
10:55 am	**International Whaling Commission (IWC) update – Dave Lundquist (DOC)** In 2019, the IWC made a recommendation to have independent experts review five different aspects of the TMP risk assessment. Last year the NZ Government contributed funding to the IWC to undertake this review. These experts were selected by the IWC, and were all from outside NZ, not working in the Māui or Hector's dolphin space, but with experience relevant to the review. The experts provided useful feedback in what was a constructive workshop prior to the IWC Scientific Committee meetings. They provided a range of recommendations for further refinement and improvement of the model. Fisheries New Zealand is developing a contract to update the risk assessment model which will address the recommendations, among other things. This work is expected to take some time to be completed due to the complex and technical nature.
12:30 pm	**Research and toxoplasmosis update – Anton van Helden (DOC)** Rochelle Constantine (University of Auckland) gave a brief overview of University of Auckland work on Māui dolphins: • Looking at Māui dolphin diet using markers in the (existing) biopsy samples to determine what the dolphins have been eating in the previous three months. • Epigenetic aging of Māui and Hector's dolphins using existing biopsy samples instead of using dolphin teeth. There were discussions around renewable energy developments proposed for the west coast of the North Island and the need to plug knowledge gaps about species in the area and the risks to the dolphins. *Q. When can Regional Councils expect any kind of direction on the steps to take to address the toxoplasmosis issue in waterways?* A. The Toxoplasmosis programme covers research programmes that will inform future management responses to reduce the load of the oocysts to the dolphins' habitat, this will include engagement with iwi partners, government agencies,

	councils, and other stakeholders. We are currently in year one of a 3-year programme of work and anticipate the development of an action plan at the end of year 3, however many of these programmes will already be involving these groups before then.
1:30 pm	**Electronic Monitoring – Daniel Kerrigan and Shelton Harley (FNZ)** *Q. Do all vessels without cameras in the Māui dolphin area have observers onboard (100% coverage) until they are equipped with cameras?* A. All eligible vessels in this area are already equipped with camera. *Q. Do the bycatch incidents of protected species include the recent Hector's dolphin bycatch incidents from the east coast of the South Island?* A. The recent Hector's dolphin bycatch incidents did not have cameras onboard, as at that time only selected vessels were using cameras. All trawl and set net vessels in that area were required to be using cameras from 31 October 2023. Comment: Its not surprising to see that protected species capture reporting will increase with increased monitoring. *Q. With regards to the criteria for vessels to operate a camera, does it exclude vessels operating in harbours?* A. No. For example, if you have a set net vessel which is above 8 m, and you operate inside a harbour, you are required to operate a camera while you're in that harbour. *Q. What about risk from vessels less than 8 m in length?* A. When Cabinet made its decision and provided funding for this work, they picked vessels to prioritise. They excluded set net vessels under 8 m, large trawlers above 32 m, and potting vessels. FNZ were not given funding for small set net vessels. The technological solution required for a small set net boat is very different from the one we've got at the moment. There isn't currently a ready-to-use solution for small vessels. Comment: There is a need for an overlap between observers and cameras, as its very difficult to detect dropouts from the nets during hauling. *Q. What proportion of the total fleet off the North Island west coast have cameras?* A. Since 1 August 2023, the Fisheries (Electronic Monitoring on Vessels) Regulations 2017 require all set net vessels greater than or equal to 8 metres in length and all trawl vessels less than or equal to 32 metres in length (excluding those exclusively targeting scampi) to operate cameras when fishing off the west coast North Island. These vessels are referred to as "in-scope". The regulations define the west coast North Island area as statistical areas 016, 037, 039, 040, 041, 042, 043, 044, 045, 046, 047 (See Appendix 1). As of 1 August 2023, 35 vessel operators of in-scope set net and trawl vessels have advised FNZ of their intention to fish off the west coast North Island and have cameras installed.

	There are an additional four in-scope vessels that are currently exempt from having an on-board camera that operate in the upper reaches of the Kaipara Harbour. These vessels (monitored via real-time position reporting) operate as 'motherships' with small (less than 8 metres in length) ancillary tender vessels. During such operations it is the tender that is used to set and haul the nets with the mothership used as a base for processing fish and for transportation of the catch. *Q. How many vessels are currently operating off the west coast of the North Island?* A. Approximately 136 vessels (set net or trawl) operated along the west coast North Island (as defined above) between 1 October 2022 and 30 September 2023. *Q. During the review of the TMP, the Sanford and WWF submission mentioned they were going to report on sightings of Māui dolphins. Have any of these sightings been logged?* A. Only Observer reported sightings have been logged at FNZ. The Department of Conservation holds a publicly available database which includes sightings by commercial fishers. See: https://www.doc.govt.nz/our-work/protecting-species/protecting-marine-species/our-work-with-maui-dolphin/maui-dolphin-sightings/ . *Q. Will there be 100% observer coverage on small setnet vessels and the large trawl vessels once the cameras are rolled out?* A. Decisions on whether a fleet will be monitored using observers are made annually. Each year, FNZ and DOC plan the number of observer days needed at sea for different fisheries and clients. Comment: With respect to data collected from cameras, the 'zeros' are highly valuable – i.e. the times when protected species bycatch doesn't occur. The roll out of cameras will provide a powerful dataset.
2:40 pm	**Fisheries New Zealand Update – Sheree Judan (FNZ)** *Q. Do illegally fishing recreational fishers get their gear returned while they are under investigation, like commercial fishers do?* A. General answer is that for recreational fishers, if the gear is illegal in nature, it can't be returned to the fisher. If the gear was otherwise legal then it could be returned to the fisher. For example: if they were using net mesh too small for target species, or if the net was too long, the gear wouldn't be returned. However, if gear wasn't named correctly, for example, then gear could be returned because its an easy fix. If they were fishing in an area that was illegal, there would more likely be a prosecution outcome and gear would be seized, with forfeiture through the courts.
3:00 pm	**Fisheries science update – William Gibson (FNZ)** *Q. Are there any plans to advance the DTAG work?* A. FNZ are entering another research prioritisation process, so will consider it. Note: this question is in relation to a recently completed feasibility trial where non-invasive digital acoustic recording tags (DTAGs) using suction cups were attached to Hector's dolphins in Te Kokoo-Kupe / Cloudy Bay.

	Q. What is happening with acoustic deterrent devices? A. Acoustic Deterrent Devices (ADD, also known as Acoustic Harassment Devices AHDs) have been determined to require a permit under the MMPA 1978. The use of pingers, separate from ADDs, have not been evaluated in a New Zealand context, and their use as mitigation in a New Zealand context is unproven. *Q. Was the DTAG tagging project discussed with Tangata Whenua?* A. Yes, this was undertaken as part of the permit application process, and informed the design of the work that was undertaken in Cloudy Bay in February 2023. *Q. There has been talk in the community that the people taking biopsy samples from Māui dolphins have been over-vigorously shooting the dolphins with the darts. Is this true?* A. The team works very hard to not biopsy the animals more than once each survey year and take this work very seriously. Occasionally a dolphin is sampled more than once. All this information is in the published reports available on the DOC website, including details of the response of each dolphin sampled. *Q. Are there any plans to fill in knowledge gaps of the effects of aquaculture on the dolphins?* A. Nothing is planned at present.
3:00 pm	**Wrap up discussion and next steps** • Observer protocols and fisheries data update will be provided by FNZ. • For more information about the Aquatic Environment Working Group get in touch with William Gibson at MPI. • DOC to engage further with tangata whenua around the Māui mahi. • Action for everyone to use and promote the SeaSpotter app for reporting sightings of the dolphins. • Action for everyone to share the importance of responding as soon as possible to every dead Hector's or Māui dolphin. • DOC and FNZ to keep Forum up to date on outcomes from IWC review. • Explore collaborations and funding opportunities with tangata whenua. • NGOs are encouraged to set up a Māui dolphin data portal. • Everyone is encouraged to engage with offshore wind energy proposals and mahi. • Pass on feedback and suggestions to DOC on how to improve these meetings.

Appendix 1: Map of the North Island showing fisheries statistical areas off the west coast North Island and the Māui dolphin Habitat Zone.

Appendix 2: FNZ Monitoring Update for 2022-2023

Appendix 3: FNZ Observer Services Briefing Instructions

Appendix 4: Presentation 1 – Overview of progress against the TMP

Appendix 5: Presentation 2 - Research and toxoplasmosis update

Appendix 6: Presentation 3 - Electronic monitoring