Meeting Report: South Island Hector's dolphin Forum

Date: 9 November 2023

Time: 9.00 am – 1.30 pm

Location: MS Teams online meeting

Facilitator: Malene Felsing (DOC)

Attendees: Anton van Helden (DOC), Kristina Hillock (DOC), Dave Lundquist (DOC), Kirstie Knowles (DOC), Malene Felsing (DOC), Michelle Boyle (DOC), Don Neale (DOC), Jim Fyfe (DOC), Jody Weir (DOC), Jim Watts (DOC), Rosa Edwards (Inshore Council of Seafood New Zealand), 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), Allen Frazer (FNZ), Steve Halley (FNZ), Christine Rose (Māui & Hector's dolphin Defenders), Carolyn Aguilar (WWF), Chelsea McGaw (Forest and Bird), Scott Baker (Oregon State University), Jim Roberts (Independent), Deanna Clement (Cawthron), Steve Dawson (Independent), Alana Alexander (Otago University), Will Rayment (Otago University), Simon Childerhouse (Environmental Law Initiative), Ash Rabel (Environment Southland), Harry Allard (Nelson City Council), Ramari Oliphant Stewart (Marine mammal Consultant) , Trudy Heath (Te Rūnanga o Waihao), Jana Hayes (Te Rūnanga o Ngai Tahu), Dennis Buurman (Dolphin Encounter, Kaikoura), Paul Milligan (Black Cat Cruises and Canterbury Conservation Board), Mark Bryan (Southland Conservation Board).

Purpose:

- To provide an update on the implementation of the Hector's and Māui Dolphin Threat Management Plan in relation to the South Island Hector's 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, welcome and housekeeping – Malene Felsing (DOC)** **Opening comments, context, and purpose – Kirstie Knowles (DOC) and Marianne Lukkien (FNZ).**
9:20 am	**Introductions and expectations from participants**
9:55 am	**Overview of progress against the TMP objectives – Kristina Hillock (DOC).** **Q. Noting that the TMP is a non-statutory document, how do we strengthen the requirement to meet the goals and objectives of the TMP?** A. Whilst the TMP isn't a statutory document, it drives the regulatory frameworks that are put in place, and those frameworks are designed to achieve the outcomes specified in the TMP. The TMP brings those statutory management tools together to be more cohesive. **Q. Does a population management plan or species management plan have statutory requirements?** A. If a population management plan was created, it could have requirements in it with statutory effect, similar to a TMP. The wording of the relevant sections of the Marine Mammals Protection Act makes it biologically implausible to develop a PMP to manage the effects of fishing, however, as it requires fishing bycatch to be set at

	a level which allows the threatened species to recover to non-threatened status within 20 years. For slowly reproducing species such as Hector's dolphins, this is not possible even in the absence of effects from fishing and all other human activities. **Q. What would be a trigger for a review of the TMP?** A. A specific trigger for reviewing the TMP hasn't been defined, but rather an adaptive management approach. If something emerges as an issue, or threat, the TMP allows for a response and management approach to be incorporated under the existing TMP.
10:40 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 with similar species. 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. **Q. The current TMP is based on the outcomes of the risk assessment, in which fish prey species distribution was used as a proxy for dolphin habitat. Warmer seas may mean that fish prey species are moving elsewhere. With the recent dolphin sightings along the east coast of the North Island, what is the trigger for reviewing the dolphin distribution from the risk assessment model?** A. The risk assessment model is being updated and will be re-run to evaluate risk to the dolphins. If the outcome suggests that current management measures are no longer likely to meet the objectives of the TMP, then agencies are obliged to act on this new information.
10:50 am	**Update on onboard cameras – Dan Kerrigan and Shelton Harley (FNZ)** **Q. Is the west coast of the South Island a lower priority for Hector's dolphins, or are there other reasons why it hasn't been addressed in the TMP, and has been deferred for the camera rollout?** A. The west coast of the South Island isn't a lower priority. However, the risk assessment indicated existing risk from fisheries was low enough to meet the objectives of the TMP. Therefore, no additional management measures were required in this area.
11:30 am	**Management of South Island Hector's dolphins – John Richardson (FNZ)** **Q. How do Fisheries Mortality Limits account for unobserved threatened species capture?**

	A. A spatially explicit risk assessment model was used to estimate encounters between Hector's dolphins and commercial fisheries as a function of their overlap in space. This model estimated annual deaths and attempts to account for unobserved or cryptic mortality. The model also produces a Population Sustainability Threshold (PST) – an estimate of the maximum number of deaths that can occur which still allowing sub- and local populations to achieve their population objectives (as outlined in the Hector's and Māui Dolphin Threat Management Plan. Each Fisheries Related Mortality Limit (FRML) is informed by its associated Population Sustainability Threshold (PST) – in this way, unobserved captures are accounted for. **Q. Is it true that the 1 m headline height restriction in certain areas for trawl is not based on any hard data (although logically is likely to catch fewer dolphins)?** A. Correct. The only information available to inform assessment of the potential effectiveness of trawl gear restrictions (i.e., low headline height trawl nets or low tow speed) is anecdotal and observational information. **Q. What is the impact of trawling through Hector's dolphin habitat?** A. The impact of bottom trawling on Hector's dolphin is generally focused on bycatch risk rather than direct impacts on habitat occupied by Hector's dolphins. While Hector's dolphins have been observed foraging in association with demersal trawlers on Banks Peninsula – presumably targeting the fish disturbed but not captured by the trawl net – the impact of trawling on Hector's dolphin habitat is primarily related to prey availability. Along with turbid water, prey availability is noted as a key variable influencing Hectors dolphin abundance. **Q. What compliance happens around monitoring headline height of trawl nets?** A. During vessel inspection, it is standard practice for Fisheries Compliance to examine trawl net headline height of inshore trawlers operating within 2 nm of the coast.
12:45 pm	**Research and toxoplasmosis update – Anton van Helden (DOC)** **Q. Are there any plans to re-investigate sub-population structure of the west coast South Island Hector's dolphins?** A. There is a plan to collect genetic samples through biopsy from north of Karamea. All other sampling is currently ad hoc or from stranded dead animals but are archived in the New Zealand Cetacean Tissue Archive (NZCeTA) that will allow for future genetic analyses. There is no other specific programme at this stage targeting the west coast of the South Island. **Q. Are there any proactive measures going to be put in place to protect Hector's dolphins along the east coast of the North Island?** A. There are no plans at present. **Q. Has there been anything to look at the effects of trophic impacts on Hector's dolphins, or climate change impacts?** A. We have a contract for a research project underway that is looking at the climatic drivers of prey distribution of Hector's and Māui dolphins, that should be completed by June 2024.
1:15 pm	**Wrap up discussion and next steps**

	• FNZ to provide figures from the west coast North Island proof of concept camera trial. • How can we improve participation from iwi Māori in this Forum? • Agencies to provide an assessment of performance of the TMP against previous goals and objectives. • Everyone pass on feedback and suggestions to DOC on how to improve these Forum meetings.

Appendix 1 – Overview of progress against TMP objectives presentation.

Appendix 2 – Electronic monitoring update.

Appendix 3 – Fisheries management update presentation.

Appendix 4 – Research and toxoplasmosis update presentation.

Appendix 5 – FNZ monitoring update 2023.