

AM16-0377

Ministry for Primary Industries  
Manatū Ahu Matua



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**Aide-memoire:**

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**To:** Hon. Nathan Guy  
Minister for Primary Industries

**Cc:** Associate Minister for Primary Industries

**Date:** 8 July 2016

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**IWC Scientific Committee 2016 Outcomes**

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**Purpose**

1. To provide you with an update on the outcomes of the recent International Whaling Commission (IWC) Scientific Committee meeting with regards to the Hector's and Māui dolphins. The IWC Scientific Committee report is expected to be released shortly.

**Key Messages**

- The Scientific Committee continues to call for further removal of fishing-related threats in the range of Māui dolphins (i.e. out to 20 nm) to avoid any risk of bycatch.
- Protection measures are in place where intensity of fishing activity and likelihood of dolphin presence was likely to pose the greatest level of risk; outside of these areas, monitoring programmes are in place.
- The Scientific Committee has endorsed the Hector's dolphin abundance estimates and the underlying methodology.

**International Whaling Commission Scientific Committee Outcomes**

2. The 68<sup>th</sup> meeting of the IWC Scientific Committee was held in Slovenia in June 2016. In recent years, the Committee has made various (non-binding) recommendations regarding New Zealand's management and protection of the critically endangered Māui dolphin. The Committee reviews scientific research and publication of results, statistics and reports on the world's cetacean populations.

## Security Level – In Confidence

3. The Ministry for Primary Industries (MPI) was part of the New Zealand delegation that attended this Committee meeting. New Zealand's management of the Māui dolphin was on the agenda as New Zealand agreed in 2014 to report annually to the Committee against progress in the implementation of conservation measures. In addition, there was an additional paper tabled by Dr. Liz Slooten of Otago University that was critical of New Zealand's fishery observer monitoring programmes of Māui and Hector's dolphins.
4. The IWC Scientific report is expected to be released shortly, but is currently embargoed. The report includes (refer to Appendix 1):
  - a. a set of recommendations for greater protection of Māui dolphins from fishing activity to minimise the risk of bycatch and maximise the chances of population increase; and
  - b. the Committee's endorsement of the aerial survey research methodology that has been used to update the abundance estimates for the three South Island Hector's dolphin populations.
5. Most notable, with respect to New Zealand's current management framework for the Māui dolphin, is that the Committee defines the species range offshore to 20 nautical miles from Maunganui Bluff down to Whanganui. This is a far greater area than the focus of the fishing-related management measures New Zealand has in place, which extend from Maunganui Bluff south to Hawera and offshore to 7 nautical miles.
6. Media interest (both domestic and international) in the Committee's final recommendations and any differences in the recommended protected area, versus the areas where protection measures are currently in place, will likely be significant. MPI and the Department of Conservation (DOC) both have communication plans in place to address such questions.
7. The results of the two-year survey of Māui dolphins, which are expected by October 2016, will provide updated scientifically robust data about the status of the population to help inform future management measures. Some early indications from this survey are encouraging, with sightings of large groups of about 10-12 dolphins and more females than males present.

### Implications of the 2016 recommendations

8. There is little opportunity to relitigate the recommendations of the Committee once publicly released. The Committee's recommendations, particularly in terms of the species range, adopt a very precautionary approach, based on the critically endangered status of the Māui dolphin population.



**Security Level – In Confidence**

9. The focus of any coverage will be on the area where protection measures are in place and how they differ to the area defined as Māui dolphin habitat/range by the Committee.

**Recommendations and Communications**

10. In preparation for the release of the IWC's report, MPI has prepared key messaging to address any inquiries that are received (Appendix 2). MPI will work with your office when we receive any such inquiries.
11. MPI will continue to liaise with DOC (which led the New Zealand delegation) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, on any communications with respect to the IWC.

**Minister / Minister's Office**

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## Appendix 1. IWC Scientific Committee 2016

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### *Recommendations on Māui dolphins*

- The Committee **welcomes** the update on research provided but noted that no new management actions had been enacted since 2013.
- The Committee **notes** that one of the main challenges is how to assess trends in this population, and **agreed** that further development of tools (e.g., power analysis) to reduce uncertainty and minimise the time required to detect population change would be useful.
- Given the information presented this year, the Committee **concludes**, as it has repeatedly in the past, that existing management measures in relation to bycatch mitigation fall short of what has been recommended previously and **expresses continued grave concern** over the status of this small, severely depleted subspecies. The human-caused death of even one individual would increase the extinction risk. The Committee **reiterates** its previous recommendation that highest priority should be assigned to immediate management actions to eliminate bycatch of Māui dolphins. This includes closures of any fisheries within the range of Māui dolphins that are known to pose a risk of bycatch to dolphins (i.e. set net and trawl fisheries). It **re-emphasises** that the critically endangered status of this subspecies and the inherent and irresolvable uncertainty surrounding information on most small populations point to the need for precautionary management.
- Ensuring full protection of Māui dolphins throughout their known range, together with an ample buffer zone, would minimise the risk of bycatch and maximise the chances of population increase. The Committee **notes** that the confirmed current range extends from Maunganui Bluff in the north to Whanganui in the south, offshore to 20 nm, and it includes harbours. Within this defined area, fishing methods other than set nets and trawling should be used. The Committee again **urges** the New Zealand Government to commit to specific population increase targets and timelines for Māui dolphin conservation, and again **respectfully requests** that reports be provided annually on progress towards the conservation and recovery goals.

### *Recommendations on Hector's dolphins*

- The Committee **encourages** further work to consider the recommendations presented in the IEG report.
- The Committee **agrees** to the recommendations in the IEG report and therefore, **endorses** the abundance estimates produced by MacKenzie and Clement (2014a, 2014b, 2016a, 2016b).



## Security Level – In Confidence

### Appendix 2. Proposed key messaging on IWC recommendations

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- The Māui dolphin population is at a very low level and supporting the recovery of the population is a priority for the New Zealand Government.
- New Zealand has taken a proactive approach to securing the long-term future of Māui dolphins. This approach is underpinned by our Hector's and Māui Dolphin Threat Management Plan (TMP), which has been in place since 2008.
- An extensive review of the Māui dolphin portion of the TMP was undertaken in 2012-13 resulting in an increase in fishing restrictions and greater monitoring. The range of fishing and other restrictions, and monitoring across the area where Māui dolphins are most commonly found are extensive.
- Spatial closures on the North and South Islands to avoid capture in trawl nets covers approximately 8,319 km<sup>2</sup>, and about 15,000 km<sup>2</sup> is closed to set netting.
- DOC and MPI are currently working with independent researchers to carry out a detailed two year survey of Māui dolphins that will give the Government with updated scientifically robust data about the status of the population.
- Definitive population estimates will not be available until next year but some early indications from this year's survey are encouraging. There were sightings of large groups of about 10-12 dolphins and more females than males were present.
- The protection measures in place for Māui dolphins, where MPI and DOC consider fishing poses a risk, are based on robust data, including DNA sampling and validated sightings.

#### *Observer coverage*

- In areas where Māui dolphins may occasionally range but their presence is considered rare, measures are in place to reduce uncertainty and improve information on Māui dolphin interaction with fishing.
- MPI has 100% observer coverage on all set net vessels operating around Taranaki out to 7 nautical miles and are increasing coverage in the trawl fishery – targeting the area between Maunganui Bluff and Pariokariwa Point out to 7 nautical miles.
- Maintaining and increasing monitoring through observer coverage provides the Government with an opportunity to respond and put in place additional management measures as necessary to avoid, remedy or mitigate any interactions within fishing-related activities.

## Security Level – In Confidence

### *Prioritising management actions*

- The Committee agreed that research into monitoring the population and better understanding their distribution is critical to protecting the Māui dolphin.
- To assist in dealing with those challenges, MPI and DOC established the Māui dolphin Research Advisory Group to prioritise research to help inform management decisions. The Group provides an ideal opportunity for government to work with iwi, and stakeholders to progress the necessary research.
- The Māui dolphin Research Advisory Group is made up of scientific and stakeholder experts whose role is to develop a research programme to support the evolution of the Threat Management Plan and ongoing protection and recovery of these important marine mammals. They will consider such factors like monitoring small populations in proposing any new research projects.
- MPI will continue to monitor existing measures, review new information and implement science programmes to ensure our management of these important mammals is as effective as it can be.

### *Protection area*

- There is uncertainty about the extent and frequency of Māui dolphin distribution along the West Coast of the North Island, which makes it difficult to quantify the residual risk that exists by fishery and region.
- The best understanding of dolphin distribution comes from the independent risk assessment of threats to Māui dolphins that was undertaken in 2012.
- The distribution was estimated by the expert panel, including information on research sightings, stranding's, and public sightings. Their estimates indicated that Māui dolphins range offshore to 7 nautical miles and are found from Maunganui Bluff to Whanganui but most commonly between Kaipara and Raglan harbours. The southern extent of that range is based on a historical stranding of a Māui or Hector's dolphin (subspecies unknown) in the late 1980s.
- Set net and trawl bans are in place where we considered current fishing posed the greatest risk to the dolphins.
- Outside of these areas where Māui dolphins may occasionally range but their presence is considered rare, monitoring programmes are in place to ensure that action can be taken if dolphins are present.