



## Dear friend of the Dolphin,

Hector's dolphins, endemic in New Zealand's coastal waters, are some of the most threatened dolphins in the world. In 2002, the North Island population was found to be a distinct sub-species named Maui's dolphin. With numbers estimated at around 100, they are critically endangered. The South Island population of Hector's dolphins are split into several populations and overall have been estimated at little more than 7000 – down from more than 26000 in 1970 – and they are classified as endangered.



### Fact Sheet

With a length of only up to 1.5 metres the Hector's and Maui's dolphin belong to the smallest species of cetaceans in the world. It is easy to recognise them from their rounded dorsal fin, which often bears unusual marks and notches. Researchers photograph the dolphins' dorsal fin and individuals can be recognised by the distinguishing features of their unique dorsal fin. Hector's and Maui's dolphins are lowly fecund, slow breeding animals. These biological factors, along with the fact that they are vulnerable to several threats from human activities, may have significant implications for the viability of these populations.



### Threats

Otago University lecturer Liz Slooten is convinced that set nets pose a significant threat to the dolphins: "I rank set nets, closely followed by trawling, as the number one threat to Hector's dolphins. Pollution and then tourism are distant third and fourth in terms of risk. Restrictions on set nets and trawling in areas where Hector's and Maui's dolphins are found would be by far the most effective protection measure." [Westport News, 11/01/2007]

### Research

For several years, WDCS has been helping to fund some of the research on Hector's dolphins by Liz Slooten's team at the University of Otago. Part of their studies included a survey of the distribution of Hector's dolphins at Bank Peninsula on the east coast of the South Island, to evaluate the effectiveness of the Bank Peninsula Marine mammal Sanctuary, which was introduced in 1988.

They found that there is a strong preference for inshore waters in summer, which is likely to be related to prey distribution patterns (several of their prey species come closer to shore in summer to spawn), and they seek more sheltered waters during spring and summer when calves are born. In winter time, their distribution is more dispersed, and therefore makes these dolphins vulnerable to death in gill-net fisheries outside the boundaries of the sanctuary. The researchers concluded that the risk of continued population decline can be reduced by extending the sanctuary.

### Conservation

The responsible authorities in New Zealand are currently working on a Threat Management Plan for Hector's dolphins to address bycatch of this species in New Zealand. The WDCS expert in the field is lobbying the authorities to strengthen the regulations in the plan.

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