

Counties Sport Fishing Club

12/6/2007

The Counties Sport Fishing Club has no wish to see the Maui dolphin become extinct. Many of our club members have sighted these dolphins over the years.

Our club is very concerned about possible changes to the way we will be able to use the Manukau Harbour and other areas along the West Coast as a result of the Hector's Dolphin Threat Management Discussion Document and other groups who are advocating change within the Harbour and along the coast.

Some of the changes that have been suggested include: A marine mammal sanctuary, prohibitions, speed restrictions, gear setting restrictions, set net bans, and seasonal restrictions amongst others.

Our club is completely against any changes to the current set net ban that controls the harbour and coast or the introduction of more regulations.

CSFC has 742 members currently and is a member of New Zealand Big Game Fishing Council.

Since the 1st January 2000 the CSFC radio station on VHF channel 5 has logged 5484 club boats and other non club boats crossing the Manukau Harbour and Waikato river bars. These boats have contained 16,445 people. We believe our club and its members are well qualified to comment on this fishery and Maui dolphins as we are probably amongst the group of people who see these dolphins the most.

During this time a large number of sightings of Maui dolphins were reported to Counties Sport Radio, and the forms that were supplied by DOC, were completed and passed onto them. No record of the exact number of completed forms were kept but it would be approximately 50. (some of the forms we have here tonight). Every report except one has sighted the Maui dolphins either off the coast or around the Harbour entrances or within the current set net restriction areas. The one report from further up the Harbour was from a non club member who could not confirm the dolphin type and was going to phone in more information but never did. They would not give any personal details. They also said there was only one dolphin and the time of year was August, a time which usually sees the Maui moving further off the coast. (We have this sighting form here tonight). Most sightings are in late spring and summer when the weather is more favourable for boats to be across the bar. We have a chart here tonight that some club members have marked as to where they have sighted Maui dolphins.

No club boat that has been monitored by Counties Sport Radio has ever hit a Maui dolphin or has CSFC ever heard of this happening within our club waters.

It has been suggested that speed restrictions of 5 knots be adhered to when within 300 meters of Maui dolphins. This is ridiculous, it is common knowledge that the majority of sightings occur around the harbour and river bars. If a 5 knot rule was introduced restricting the speed that vessels could navigate the bars this would surely result in boats getting into danger as faster speeds are required to safely navigate the bars.

It is accepted that the two Maui dolphin that were found washed up in our area were caught in nets, however both were to be found in set nets that had broken free and become drift nets. All other recorded deaths have the likely cause of death listed as UNKNOWN. There is no record of Maui dolphin becoming tangled in nets that have been correctly set and managed.

Our club feels that if further measures are required to further protect the Maui dolphins then the likes of DOC, MFish and other government departments should look towards enforcing the laws that already exist. Fund the employment of more fisheries officers and get more boats on the water to police the existing laws. Get fisheries officers onto commercial boats fishing off the coast or monitor them electronically to ensure they are fishing legally and in areas they are supposed to be. We all know of the illegal set nets that are set around Puketutu Island and in the Waikato River by members of the public that have little or no regard for the regulations but, rarely if ever do we hear of convictions of these people. Further regulations on top of the existing rules will do nothing to stop these people continuing what they do. Invest some money into educating people on the regulations and rules that exist rather than take away the right of people to use the harbour and coast as they can now, to solve a problem that does not exist.

Your own information as supplied by you in the discussion document shows that no Maui dolphins have been caught in set nets since the current set net ban was introduced.

NOTHING IS BROKEN, NOTHING NEEDS FIXING!!!!

Written on behalf of the Counties Sport Fishing Club by,

Mark Franklin,

Vice President.