

Hon Jim Anderton

Minister of Fisheries, Minister of Forestry

12 September 2008

Media statement

Government will defend fishing bans to cut risk to Hector's and Maui's dolphins

Fisheries Minister Jim Anderton said the Government would strongly defend the fishing industry suit filed today.

The Federation of Commercial Fishermen, South East Finfish Management Ltd, Challenger Finfisheries Management Company Ltd, and the Northern Fisheries Management Stakeholder Company today filed in the Wellington High Court a challenge to the Minister's decision to introduce a package of regional bans and other restrictions on set netting, drift netting and trawling which are due to come into force on 1 October 2008.

The parties are seeking a judicial review to overturn all the commercial fishing measures, and interim orders in relation to some of them. The parties' court action does not apply to similar measures due to come into force for recreational fishers on the same day.

Jim Anderton said the industry risked being seen by its customers around the world as driving an iconic species of dolphin to extinction.

"This industry has, I believe, the opportunity to be the world's most environmentally friendly supplier of fish from a sustainable wild fishery.

"New Zealand's trading partners, buyers in our markets, and especially consumers are paying very close attention to the responsibilities of producers and the behaviour of our industry in taking this suit is, at the very least, unfortunate. New Zealand cannot afford to lose one more Maui's dolphin – the species is far too close to extinction for comfort."

Jim Anderton said the decisions he had made had been difficult and the measures he chose were not the most severe of the options being proposed.

"They struck the best achievable balance between the activities of fishers and the protection of Hector's and Maui's dolphins—a species that is one of the rarest in the world, is found only in our waters, and is entirely New Zealand's responsibility.

"I understand the concerns of those whose livelihoods will be affected. That's why the decisions I made were hard but necessary.

"However, I made my decisions on the basis of the best available information—scientific data, information from commercial, recreational, environmental and iwi interests, an analysis of economic and social effects, and advice from the Ministry of Fisheries, NIWA, and the Department of Conservation. These measures are the result of two years of careful analysis and wide public consultation, during which I considered about 2,500 submissions on the options presented in a draft Threat Management Plan," he said.

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Background

The government's new regional bans and other restrictions for commercial and recreational fishers apply to set netting, drift netting and trawling. Cabinet approved the regulations on 25 August, 2008.

They are due to come into force on 1 October, 2008 and affect the coastal waters where the dolphins are most often found, on the:

North Island west coast—from Maunganui Bluff north of Kaipara Harbour to Pariokariwa Point north of New Plymouth

South Island east and south coasts—from Cape Jackson in the Marlborough Sounds to Sand Hill Point east of Fiordland

South Island west coast—from Farewell Spit Lighthouse to Awarua Point north of Fiordland.

The Hector's dolphin species is estimated to number fewer than 8,000. It is divided into two sub-species—the Maui's and South Island Hector's dolphins.

The Maui's dolphin sub-species lives around the North Island's west coast—where it is estimated there are only about 100 dolphins left. The Department of Conservation (DoC) classifies them as “nationally critical”.

The South Island Hector's dolphin sub-species lives in three genetically and geographically distinct groups around the South Island. On the south coast estimates of dolphin numbers range from about 90 to 400. It is estimated about 1,800 dolphins live on the east coast and about 5,400 on the west coast. DoC classifies them as “nationally endangered”.

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