

Brief Meeting report

29 May 2007

by Trish Rea

There was a meeting held on the 28th May to discuss the Department of Conservation (DoC) and Ministry of Fisheries (MFish) Hector's Dolphin Threat Management Discussion Document. Over 40 people attended the meeting plus there were three DoC staff and two MFish people. Tom Moana, co-chair of Nga Hapu O Te Uru (Tainui) was also there as he is a member of the national dolphin advisory group.

Many people at this meeting identified themselves as either commercial or non-commercial fishers.

The evidence presented by DoC and MFish does not support any management changes outside the current set net ban area for the Manukau Harbour.

Feedback from the meeting to both DoC and MFish was that people were not interested in killing dolphins and that they had no sightings of dolphins outside the current ban area, which is inside the harbour entrance.

MFish were at pains to explain that the issue is more than just about set netting i.e. pollution issues, habitat degradation, boat strikes. Drift nets seemed to pose a greater threat and were a problem in some other coastal areas.

1990s Set Net Task Force Report

The report from the 1990's set net task force has not been considered within the current process. MFish were advised to look into that plan to see if there was relevant information from that process that could be used to inform these discussions.

National Set Net Ban Campaign

A point raised during the meeting was the April letters from the Auckland, Northland and Waikato Regional Council Mayors to the Ministers of Conservation and Fisheries asking for more dolphin protection.

Both Ministers responded in a joint letter advising that the current ban within the Manukau Harbour corresponds with the known range of Maui dolphins.

There are moves afoot amongst other organisations, namely Forest &

Bird, ARC and WWF, to have a national set net ban. A petition has been organised to support this campaign. So far 16,187 people have signed the online e-petition.

MFish and DoC were advised that if there were to be any management changes that we wanted those to be implemented under the Fisheries Act 1996 legislation and not the Conservation Act or Marine Mammal Sanctuary Act. Use of the fisheries legislation would mean that fishing interests and wellbeing would have to be considered during the process.

The previously named conservation organisations have specifically mentioned that their strategy is to use these other Acts rather than the Fisheries Act, no doubt they see that strategy as a way to circumvent fisheries considerations.

Lack of Credibility

DoC and MFish were advised they needed to improve their communication for this process, this was particularly so as there is still a lot of mistrust, anger and frustration around the harbour that stems from the previous process that saw set net banned within the harbour mouth and out on the coast. Neither DoC nor MFish have credibility to spare and both organisations were encouraged to use this process as an opportunity to regain some of that credibility.

Ongoing Process

MFish advised this was the largest meeting held so far to discuss the issue. One outcome of last night's meeting was another meeting has been organised for the Waiuku/south people in two weeks time. At this stage the date is Wednesday 13th June 7.30pm (To be confirmed). MFish/DoC have three others planned, with Huakina Trust (Manukau tangata whenua), commercial fishers this Friday and Port Waikato people.

A draft Threat Management Plan will be released later in the year, submissions will be called for and final advice presented to the Ministers of fisheries and conservation. Decisions will be made before the end of the year and measures implemented by the start of summer based on the final management plan, which is due for completion by December 2007.

Attachments

Attached is a letter from the Ministers of Conservation and Fisheries written in response to the request from our Regional Council Mayors for a set net ban and ARC's initiative to organise a petition for greater dolphin protection.