

option4 Update #103

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Unjustified Punitive Measures

Once again extremists have invented a catastrophe to justify punitive measures. First the kangaroo court 1930 "Deer Menace Conference" led to decades of wasteful wholesale slaughter of deer instead of sensible ongoing management. Then the discovery of the Mount Cook Lily was used to justify wiping out unique tar, then supposedly 70 million possums devouring our forests justified a billion dollar 1080 poison campaign and now this - fishing bans to save dolphins, supposedly devastated by set nets!

What will bureaucrats discover next?

There is ongoing debate whether previous population counts of Hector's and Maui dolphin were grossly overestimated or whether there is a general decline in all dolphin species. If the latter is true then we need to find the real cause of their deaths and implement measures that address those threats.

South Island fishers have been hit hardest by the latest management measures announced by the Ministers of Fisheries and Conservation, yet evidence points to increasing, not declining, southern dolphin populations.

Nobody wants dolphins to become extinct, but putting measures in place that simply will not help, while causing hardship for present and future generations, is not smart either, even if those measures are claimed to help a little.

Assertions that set nets are the main threat to Maui dolphins are simply untrue. When dolphins die in nets they drown. Autopsies on stranded Maui show that very few died from drowning, so this eliminates nets as their leading cause of death.

Recreational set nets placed close to kelp and rocks are not in dolphin habitat. But idle bureaucratic minds dream up all sorts of fantasies to keep jobs and empires intact.

So what is the killer, if declines are real? Is it environmental, habitat degradation?

Dr Floor Anthoni, Director of the Seafriends Marine Conservation and Education Centre, provides the following explanation,

"Scientists may not have noticed that common and bottlenose dolphin populations have also declined. In fact, ALL marine species have declined spectacularly in the past thirty years and more rapidly in the past decade. This includes both fished and non-fished water-breathers, air-breathers like dolphins and even seaweeds.

"In the mid 70s New Zealand's most iconic shellfish, toheroa, collapsed. By the decade's end they enjoyed full protection, yet never made a comeback. Toheroa must be seen as the coal miner's canary, a warning of future extinctions. Management measures like total fishing bans or marine reserves no longer work.

"Thirty years later we are witnessing not only the extinction of Maui dolphin but of many other species. We have entered an era of systemic decay of our coastal seas resulting in, among other things, collapses of almost all of our coastal fisheries in perhaps as little as two decades from now.

“How can this be possible?

“When the sea becomes over-nourished with nutrients the humble bacteria that serve to recycle wastes take over. They cause death and disease in marine organisms. The water becomes 'sick' and kills. No species is exempt.

“Historically dolphin benefited from living in the rich, turbid coastal waters fed by out-flowing rivers. Now that the sea has become over-fed and 'sick', dolphin and their prey are killed by the very instinct that served them well in the distant past.”

Discover more at <http://www.seafriends.org.nz/decay/>.

We cannot ignore land management issues, runoff and excess nutrients in our waterways if we want a healthy marine environment.

Since we all live on the land from where the main problems arise, we can all help to save the sea and our dolphins. One thing is sure: those who depend on the sea for a living, for food or pleasure will fully support conservation measures that prove to work.