

Māui Dolphin

Popoto

Cephalorhynchus hectori māui

Hector's and Māui dolphins are known by other names, including Tutumairekurai, Aihe, Papakanua, Upokohue, Tukuperu, Tupoupou and Hopuhopu.

Quick Facts:

- Māui are found only on the west coast of New Zealand's North Island and are the smallest and rarest dolphins in the world, with a unique rounded dorsal fin.
- There are only about 63 Māui over the age of 1 year remaining.
- They have a shorter lifespan than other dolphins, only living till their mid-20s.
- Females typically give birth to their first calves between five – nine years of age and only have one calf every two – four years.
- They mainly communicate using clicks, which are so high-pitched humans can't hear them.
- Māui dolphins are closely related to Hector's dolphins – while they look identical they are genetically different.



Photo: Silvia Scali

Current Situation:

- With just 63 dolphins left, short lifespans and decreasing reproduction rates, the Māui dolphins are classified as *Nationally Critical* species.
- Māui dolphins are currently capable of increasing their population by around 2% each year but with the increase of natural and human factors that are impacting their birth and mortality rates, they are highly at risk.

Habitat:

- Māui dolphins are only found on the west coast of the North Island from Maunganui Bluff to Whanganui.
- They can often be seen near Manukau Harbour and Port Waikato near shores and harbour mouths, generally staying in water that is less than 30m deep.



Threats to survival:

Entanglement in fishing nets has been the largest cause of human related Māui dolphin deaths. Māui generally feed on bottom-dwelling fish and free-swimming prey and are often seen foraging around fishing boats using trawl nets. This can also lead to an increased risk of boat strike.



Photo: Steve Dawson

- *Brucella abortus* is a pathogen caused by bacteria that can cause late pregnancy abortions. This was first identified in a Māui dolphin in 2006.
- Toxoplasmosis is a parasitic disease that spreads through ingestion of infected material. The main source of infection for dolphins is most likely through freshwater run-off from the land contaminated with cat faeces. Toxoplasmosis can cause death, behavioural changes and still births.
- Pollution such as plastic debris, litter, metal toxins, oil spills, pathogens and organochlorines are also increasingly harming the Māui dolphin population.
- Changing weather patterns may also put the Māui at risk.
- Sharks such as great whites are the main predators for Māui dolphins and several sharks have been found with Māui dolphin remains in their stomachs.

What needs to be done:

- Māui protected areas extended and net fishing and trawl fishing banned from the entire Māui habitat.
- Catch limits for fishing within the Māui habitat reduced to allow an increase of bio-abundance
- Further research to better understand the impacts of pollution and diseases on Māui dolphins and how these impacts can be avoided.
- Reduction of toxins, disease and plastic debris from the Māui dolphin habitat
- Fundraising to support better monitoring and research of the Māui dolphin.
- Addressing the major issues threatening the health of our oceans including climate change.

How can you help?

- Report Māui dolphin sightings to DOC on 0800 362 468
- Dispose of cat poo in the bin not the toilet.
- Support practices to end feral cat populations.
- Act safely around dolphins - move boats carefully, don't obstruct their path or separate mothers from calves, avoid loud or sudden noises, don't swim if there are calves present and don't try to touch or feed dolphins.
- Support calls for greater protections of the Māui dolphin habitat
- Improve rainwater runoff - drains are streams.
- Donate to support research and projects to support the Māui dolphin