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New fishing bans to protect Hector's and Maui's dolphins

New fishing rules are in force around much of New Zealand this summer to protect our threatened Hector's and Maui's dolphins.

Set netting is now banned around much of the South Island's coastline, with new trawl restrictions close to shore on the east and south coasts.

On the upper North Island's west coast existing set net bans have been extended, and there are extended trawling and new drift netting bans. All the new rules for recreational fishers came into force as scheduled on 1 October 2008.

Commercial fishers have lodged a legal challenge to the commercial rules which will be heard by the Wellington High Court in April 2009. In September 2008, the Court granted interim relief, which stopped some of the new commercial rules coming into effect in some areas as scheduled. However, others are in force.

Fishers should check the rules for the place where they fish, before they go fishing, by visiting fish.govt.nz or by calling their nearest MFish office.

"We have observed a high level of compliance with these new regulations," says MFish National Manager, Fisheries Compliance, Andrew Coleman.

"Over the Christmas holiday period there is a big increase in the amount of recreational fishing, and we're reminding all fishers to check the rules before they set off.

"That's especially so for people who are planning to fish at holiday spots a distance from where they usually live or fish, as they may not be familiar with changes in the area."

OBSERVERS ON DECK

MFish observers will be on inshore commercial fishing vessels over January and February 2009, as part of a new summer programme to collect information on any interactions between fishing vessels and protected species, including Hector's and Maui's dolphins.

Deepwater and National Issues Manager, Tom Chatterton, says there were calls for the gathering of better information on Hector's and Maui's dolphins in submissions on the Threat Management Plan for the species.

"This is a great opportunity for MFish and the industry to work together to collect data that will keep adding to our understanding.

"We'll be placing up to 50 observers on commercial vessels around much of the South Island and on the North Island's west coast.

"There is still some overlap between the areas in which the dolphins live and the areas where there is fishing activity. The summer programme will help us determine the nature of continuing interactions. It's designed to give us a high level of coverage over a short timeframe, and we'd like to thank fishers for the co-operation they've shown," says Tom.

MFish observers will use palm-top devices to record information on whether they see dolphins; and if so whether they interact with vessels and fishing gear, what happens, and whether there are any deaths.

Tom says MFish is very aware of the sensitivities around fishing-related deaths of protected species—and if there are any deaths MFish will keep the details of any fishers and vessels involved confidential.

The cost of taking observers on board will not be charged to individual vessels. It will be recovered from the industry through levies across all fish stocks being observed within the Quota Management Area.

FISHING THREAT

Hector's and Maui's dolphins are among the world's rarest dolphin species and they are only found in New Zealand waters. It is estimated that there are fewer than 8,000 of the Hector's dolphin species left, living mostly around the South Island. The North Island Maui's dolphin sub-species is estimated to number only around 111 dolphins, and is classified as "nationally critical" by the Department of Conservation.

Fishing is the greatest known human threat to Hector's and Maui's dolphins—responsible for about 75 per cent of reported deaths with a known cause.

Set nets are the main fishing threat. Dolphins can get entangled in the fine nylon nets and drown. However, there have also been reports of dolphins being caught in trawl nets. Other human threats include marine tourism, vessel traffic, mining, construction, coastal development, pollution, sedimentation, oil spills, plastic bags, marine farming and climate change.

The new fishing rules are the result of two years of analysis and public consultation.



CHECK THE RULES

New prohibitions and other restrictions on set netting, drift netting and trawling are now in force to reduce the risk to threatened Hector's and Maui's dolphins. They affect 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 in the north to Awarua Point north of Fiordland.

There are also existing fishing rules in these and other parts of New Zealand. Fishing rules can vary from place to place.

Check the rules for the place where you fish – before you go fishing.

REPORT ILLEGAL FISHING



CALL 0800 4 POACHER
(0800 476 224)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON FISHING RULES
CALL YOUR NEAREST MFISH OFFICE OR GO TO:
fish.govt.nz



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