



The Right Honorable Helen Clark
Prime Minister
Parliament Buildings
Wellington
New Zealand

26 May, 2008

Dear Ms. Clark:

On behalf of the IUCN I would like to convey our concerns about the threats to Hector's dolphin *Cephalorhynchus hectori*, including the North Island subspecies *Cephalorhynchus hectori maui*.

IUCN, the International Union for Conservation of Nature, brings governments, non-governmental organizations, United Nations agencies, businesses and local communities together to develop and implement conservation policy, legislation and best practice. The IUCN is the world's oldest and largest global environmental network, comprising more than 1,000 governmental and non-governmental member organizations, as well as some 10,000 scientists from more than 160 countries.

The recent extinction of the *baiji*, *Lipotes vexillifer*, the Chinese river dolphin, is a reminder of the vulnerability of dolphins and porpoises to human activities. There are several factors that are known to put dolphins and other small cetaceans at risk. These include being an endemic species, living in small and fragmented populations, and overlap with gillnet fisheries. Each of these applies to New Zealand's endemic Hector's dolphins.

New Zealand has demonstrated a strong commitment to the conservation of marine ecosystems. For example, we commend you for creating the Bank's Peninsula Marine Mammal Sanctuary and the Protected Area for Maui's dolphins off the North Island west coast. The Draft Threat Management Plan now under consideration promises to add much needed additional protection for Hector's dolphins throughout their geographic range.

Your country is in an excellent position to protect this species thanks to solid scientific information, an excellent legal and institutional framework, and because your government clearly cares about sustainability and conservation. Hector's dolphin is now one of the best-studied marine mammal species in the world. Detailed scientific data on the distribution, abundance, population structure and demography of these dolphins have been peer reviewed and published in national and international scientific journals. Research by academics, government and fishing industry scientists has consistently shown that the current level of by catch is unsustainable and has resulted in progressive population decline. Gillnet entanglement is the main threat to this species and requires urgent and effective management. The conservation threat caused by trawling requires further research, including fisheries observer programmes and may require management in future.

World Headquarters

IUCN
Rue Mauverney 28
1196 Gland
Switzerland

International Union for Conservation of Nature

Tel +41 22 999 0000
Fax +41 22 999 0002
mail@iucn.org
www.iucn.org



- 2 -

Globally, research has shown that the only reliable solution to gillnet by catch of dolphins and other small cetaceans is exclusion of gillnets from their habitat. The two current protected areas for Hector's and Maui's dolphins were significant steps forward. However, since they were created new research has demonstrated that these measures alone are insufficient to avoid further population declines. International experience shows that it is important to act early. Delaying effective protection measures tends to lead to more costly and less successful conservation management.

The decision before you is pivotal to addressing the threats to this species. We look forward to your leadership on this important conservation issue and hope that New Zealand's actions in this matter will continue to set a global standard for the effective conservation of the world's whales, dolphins and porpoises.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julia Marton-Lefèvre', with a large initial 'J' and 'M'.

Julia Marton-Lefèvre
Director General
IUCN

cc: Ministers of Fisheries, Conservation & Science

World Headquarters

IUCN
Rue Mauverney 28
1196 Gland
Switzerland

International Union for Conservation of Nature

Tel +41 22 999 0000
Fax +41 22 999 0002
mail@iucn.org
www.iucn.org