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New protection measures for Maui's dolphin don't go far enough

The Minister of Conservation, Hon Dr Nick Smith, today announced his decision on further protection measures for the critically threatened Maui's dolphin.

The Minister has decided to adopt his earlier proposal to vary the West Coast North Island Marine Mammal Sanctuary in order to ban the use of set nets from between two and seven nautical miles from the coast between Pariokariwa Point and the Waiwhakaiho River. In addition, the interim set net protection measures around the Taranaki coast have been made permanent and some additional measures applied to other marine activities.

The announcement was made at the launch function on the Hauraki Gulf for *Dolphins of Aotearoa*, a new book authored by Environmental Defence Society Policy Director Raewyn Peart, which focuses on human interactions with New Zealand's resident dolphins.

"Dolphins of Aotearoa describes the identification of Maui's dolphin as a distinct subspecies in 2000 and our subsequent efforts to rescue it from extinction," said Ms Peart.

"As described in the book, the measures put in place during the 2000s were a compromise between the welfare of the dolphins and the welfare of those engaged in the fishing industry. As a result, they fell a long way short of providing the dolphins with full protection.

"The ongoing decline in the size of the Maui's population, to an estimated 55 adults in 2012, has made it clear that these compromise measures are not sufficient to save the dolphin. We are therefore pleased to see that the Minister has increased the area where Maui's dolphins will be protected from set nets. It is also good to see the interim protection measures maintained.

"However, although today's decision is an improvement on the protections we currently have in place, it does not go far enough to provide the full protection that the dolphins need to survive.

"Scientists have clearly identified that the main threats to the dolphin as being commercial set nets, commercial trawl nets and recreational set nets. It is therefore important that all these fishing methods are excluded from the dolphin's entire range. However the current protections announced today do not apply to trawl nets.

"In addition, the updated sightings information released by the Minister in September shows that dolphins have been sighted outside the expanded protected area, including seawards of the Manukau Harbour.

"We would therefore like to see the protection extended to all areas where dolphins have been detected, or are likely to be present, including further out to sea and within harbours. We will be urging the Minister to undertake a review of the effectiveness of the new provisions over the next 12 months, and to consider extending them," concluded Ms Peart.