



Industry advocates for early review of Hector's dolphin protection plan

The capture of five Hector's dolphins in a set net off Banks Peninsula prompted the industry to seek early review of the threat management plan.

The mortalities were unusual and upsetting but the fisher was fishing legally in an area where he has done so for many years without such an incident.

He did not have an observer on board but promptly reported the captures, consistent with fisheries law.

Fisheries Inshore New Zealand chief executive Dr Jeremy Helson in turn directly informed Fisheries Minister Stuart Nash.

A review of the threat management plan for Hector's and the critically endangered Maui dolphins which have been in place since 2008 would be accelerated, Nash and Conservation Minister Eugenie Sage confirmed.

A science-based review is supported by the industry.

Nash agreed it was important to take an evidence-based approach and weigh up the economic and social costs of a wider set net ban on the 300 fishers who used nets.

A range of options includes a total set net ban.

Sage took a harder line, going back 45 years and drawing in Maui dolphins.

She said official records showed 188 Hector's and Maui dolphins are known to have been killed in nets in that period but felt incidents "were almost certainly under-reported and the real number was much higher".

"Having a serious look at how to best phase out these near invisible and deadly monofilament gill nets is long overdue. Fishers can use other methods to catch target species such as butterfish, mullet, rig and school shark."

That is not in fact the case with species such as reef dwelling butterflyfish, which are not trawled or potted and do not take baits.

The seafood industry is committed to reducing its impact on the marine environment.

But just as farming impacts on land, fishing activities do in some cases accidentally capture relatively small numbers of endangered species.

The fisher in this instance has voluntarily elected to stop fishing in the area six nautical miles north of the peninsula where the five Hector's were caught.

Also last month, four set netters in the vicinity of Codfish Island off the west coast of Stewart Island elected to suspend their activity within four nautical miles of the remote island until a threat management plan determined risks and any appropriate conservation measures for the yellow eyed penguin (hoiho) population was completed.

They advised ministers Nash and Sage on February 8 they "reject the notion that commercial set netting is responsible for the plight of the penguin population but have resolved to take the action as a good faith gesture".

The Ministry for Primary Industries' response to the Hector's incident was measured, putting the "unfortunate and unusual incident" into context.

"Set netting is permitted in the area where the incident occurred and the event was reported to MPI by the fisher," it confirmed.

MPI also repeated the good news on the dolphins' population – the most recent comprehensive surveys undertaken between 2012 and 2015 in the three main South Island populations revealed numbers were twice those previously thought.

"The population is now estimated to be approximately 15,000, whereas the previously published estimation was 7000," MPI said.

This fact does not suit the environmental activists' narrative so is accordingly ignored.

Neither did it feature in news reports.

About 15,000 square kilometres of inshore waters are already closed to set netting around the North and South islands in areas deemed to pose the greatest risk to the dolphins.

Seafood industry growth expected to continue

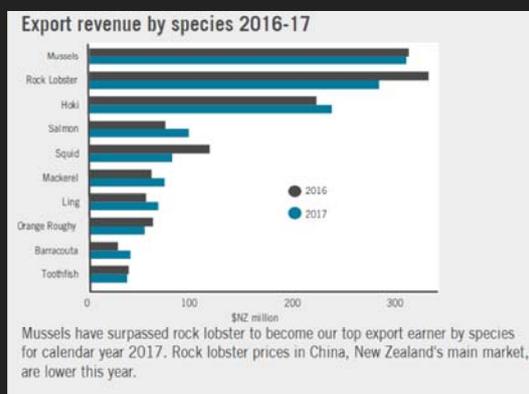
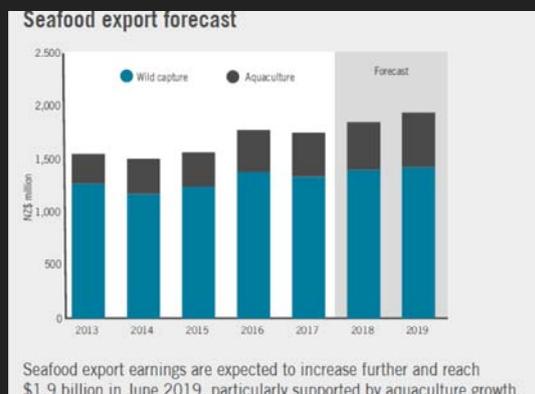
Seafood export volumes are forecast to increase in the year ending June 2018 and beyond due to salmon farm expansion and increased mussel production, the *Situation and Outlook for Primary Industries* report says.

Investment in mussel spat breeding, Precision Seafood Harvesting, and expansion of aquaculture areas will provide the seafood industry with a solid platform to grow exports.

Rising prices and increased production is forecast to result in \$1.9 billion in export revenue in the year ending June 2019, growth of nearly 5 percent from 2018.

Steady production from our wild capture fisheries combined with limited global supply of wild captures should allow industry to continue to be able to command high prices for our seafood.

[Read the report here](#)



In Brief

Forest and Bird is accusing MPI and the fishing industry of not protecting seabirds.

The environmental organisation claims fishers are breaking the law by not following measures to reduce bird captures.

"Best practice requires you either to set your lines at night, because albatrosses tend not to feed at night, and the other is to use a bird scaring line and then using weighted lines is really important," seabird advocate Karen Baird said.

"So in New Zealand it's legally required for you to use two out of those three of those mitigation measures, but it's pretty clear that's not happening."

Ministry for Primary Industries inshore fisheries manager Steve Halley said estimated captures had dropped from 9000 in 2002, to 3000 last year.

"I mean undoubtedly change in fishing effort would have had something to do with it ... but equally there has been a really significant amount of work done on improving seabird mitigation across the fishing fleet," Halley told Radio NZ.

A 2011 Ministry for Primary Industries report says there was substantial illegal behaviour by set netters of Kaikoura at the time.

The Operation Loctite report says four out of five set netters in the area engaged in illegal activity during an investigation.

A compliance team found fishers were not obeying the 24 hour soak time rules and false reporting of catch was noted.

MPI manager for compliance Gary Orr told Newshub behaviour had improved since.

"There have been changes made in the regulations since, and we've worked closely with fishers to improve compliance."

Engagement on blue cod national strategy continues

A report on the first stage of engagement on the blue cod national strategy has been released.

The Ministry for Primary Industries, over a four week period late last year, advertised the national blue cod strategy, which included drop-in sessions and an online survey.

A total of 335 people attended the drop-in sessions around the South Island and there were 1,115 responses from around the country to the online survey.

Eighty-three percent of respondents were recreational fishers.

Recreational bag limits were identified as being the major issue by those who took the online survey.

"I think most areas need to increase size limits and reduce bag limits," a fisher said.

"I have strong reservations about the so-called expert panel. My general opinion of MPI is not high. I think a strategy would be better industry-led, the industry has a strong financial incentive to come up with a workable outcome," an online commenter from BCO3 (South East) said.

The role of charter vessel operators in local fisheries was also questioned by respondents, with 28 percent of recreational fishers saying they are a major issue.

"Charter boats need to be classed as commercial fishers as these guys are consistently hammering spots," another commenter from BCO3 said.

[Read the full report](#)



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