

Maui's dolphin faces extinction unless action is taken now

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The new population estimate released by the Govt in 2012 shows there is likely to be just 55 adult Maui's left. WWF has warned the species will soon be extinct like the moa if we don't get nets out of the water throughout the dolphins' range.
Credit: Silvia Scarli

The world's rarest marine dolphin faces imminent extinction unless urgent action is taken to protect them, says WWF.

WWF is urging the New Zealand government to heed the advice of the

world's leading scientists and ensure the survival of the critically endangered Maui's dolphin through the full protection of the coastline they inhabit.

"We are down to the last 55 dolphins, so we are calling on our political leaders to let them know it's time to take action to save these precious animals," said New Zealand Executive Director Chris Howe. "At the rate we are going the only place future generations will be able to see Maui's is in museums."

Maui's dolphins are only found in New Zealand. With time running out to save the species, both the survival of Maui's dolphin and New Zealand's international reputation are on the line.

"Right now the International Whaling Commission (IWC) [scientific committee](#) is considering papers that show that the limited protections announced last year by government don't do enough and will not stop Maui's from going extinct," said Howe.

A WWF paper submitted to the committee, Addressing gaps in management approach and protection of the world's rarest marine dolphin, highlights that the government has extended protection on the basis of some sightings but has left areas unprotected where there have been equally credible sightings. The paper is being considered at the committee's 65th meeting which runs in Slovenia until May 24.



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The Scientific Committee of the International Whaling Commission will prepare a report to be formally submitted to the IWC Commission at its next meeting in September.

The IWC Scientific Committee acknowledged in its 2013 report that the human-caused death of even one dolphin in such a small population would increase the extinction risk and that Maui's need to be fully protected from gillnetting and trawling. This followed a similar call from the IWC in 2012.

The government announced interim protection measures in June 2012,

but dangerous fishing activity is still allowed to continue in parts of the Maui's environment off New Zealand's west coast, and within its harbours.

WWF is calling for the New Zealand government to extend the ban on net and trawl fishing to cover the Maui's entire territory and to work with fishing communities to save the Maui's.

"Support should also be provided to fishers to help them transition to dolphin-friendly practices. Fishing communities should not have to bear the cost of saving this precious dolphin alone," he says.



Maui's dolphins, North Island, New Zealand. Credit: Kirsty Russell

The last count by the New Zealand Department of Conservation in 2012 estimated there to be about 55 Maui's adult dolphins in New Zealand waters and that we can only afford to lose one dolphin every 10 to 23 years without impacting the population's ability to recover.

Scientists' estimate that over 95% of unnatural Maui's deaths are caused by entanglement and drowning in gillnet or trawl fishing.

WWF launched the [Last 55 campaign](#) this week in support of the species. The campaign is calling on all New Zealand's political leaders to make a commitment to save the last 55 critically endangered Maui's dolphins.

Provided by WWF

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