Forest & Bird calls for action over Hector?s dolphin deaths

Title
Forest & Bird (BirdLife Partner in New Zealand) calls on the Ministers of Fisheries and Conservation to better protect New Zealand's endangered Hector's dolphins following news of two dolphin deaths in fishing nets, kept quiet by the Government until today. Forest & Bird is shocked to discover that the Government kept under wraps for six months the deaths of two Hector's dolphins in commercial set nets.

Three Hector's dolphins have been reported drowned in set nets in the past year:

- 8 May 2009 – Sub-adult male Hector's dolphin off Kaikoura
- 1 November 2009 – Sub-adult male Hector's dolphin caught in South Bay, Kaikoura
- 26 January 2010 – Hector's dolphin caught north of Timaru

The Department of Conservation today released information on Hector's dolphin deaths since October 2009, including the two fishing deaths. This followed a media release by Kaikoura marine guardian group Te Korowai o Te Tai o Marokura, which has only now been told about the dolphin death off the Kaikoura coast. This marks the second Hector's dolphin drowned in set nets off Kaikoura since the 2008 set net regulations were put in place. Forest & Bird – a member of Te Korowai – is alarmed that these dolphin deaths were not revealed sooner. "For such crucial information to be released by a concerned community group instead of the government departments responsible for managing our fisheries and the conservation of these endangered dolphins is disgraceful," Marine Conservation Advocate Kirstie Knowles says.

The Hector's dolphin is an endangered species. In 2008 the Minister of Fisheries placed a set-net ban within four nautical miles off the east coast of the South Island, except along the Kaikoura coast. "This information clearly shows that the dolphins are found in areas where we didn't previously know they were found, and that the set-net ban boundaries should be immediately revised," Ms Knowles says.

Hector's dolphins are classified as nationally critical by the Department of Conservation and listed as an endangered species threatened with extinction by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). Just 7000 Hector's dolphins are estimated to remain. The North Island sub-species – Maui's dolphin – number just 111 individuals. Hector's dolphins are the smallest and one of the rarest marine dolphins in the world. Forest & Bird is calling for increased protection of Hector's and Maui's dolphins, particularly off Kaikoura, Timaru and Taranaki, where they are still being caught in fishing nets or are unprotected. Image Credit: benzpics63 / Flickr