

27 August, 2018

Dr. Lian Butcher
Director Aquatic at Department of Conservation

Dr. Stuart Anderson
Director Fisheries Management, Fisheries New Zealand

Dear Drs. Butcher and Anderson:

I recently participated as an independent panelist to provide suggestions on the Threat Management Plan for Hector's and Maui dolphins, which is in the late stages of development. To set the context of the remainder of this letter, I'd like to briefly tell you a bit about myself. I hope to provide some suggestions on how to improve future conservation efforts for Hector's dolphins.

I work for the US National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and have served on many status reviews of endangered species. I presently serve as the lead evaluator of International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List assessments for cetaceans (whales, dolphins and porpoises) (in close collaboration with Randall Reeves, who chairs the IUCN Cetacean Specialist Group and also served on the Hector's dolphin panel this year). I chair the Conservation Committee of the Society for Marine Mammalogy and was for many years intensely involved in scientific analyses for the International Whaling Commission's Scientific Committee. I also have been heavily involved in the international recovery team for the vaquita, Mexico's endemic porpoise species, for the past 20-plus years. As such, I feel I'm in a good position to offer some constructive comments that are more relevant to you as natural resource managers than specifically to the team of scientists currently working on the TMP because they pertain to the interaction between scientists (both governmental and non-governmental) and managers.

This is my second experience with the Threat Management Plan process, the first being with the Maui dolphin TMP in 2012. In both cases, it was clear that the full benefits of using a team of scientists who hold all or most of the national expertise and who trust one another was not being realized. In both cases, the work was done by a group of government scientists and contractors (NIWA) but without the full integration and collaboration of the academic scientists who have produced nearly all the publications on Hector's and Maui dolphins. This meant missing out on an enormous amount of historic knowledge that could have been used to secure the very best scientific advice. In my experience, the most productive and effective outcomes are the result of working as a team over an extended period of time.

A good example is the international recovery team for vaquitas that was assembled and led by Mexican scientists to advise the government on conservation of their endemic porpoise. This team's members have worked together for close to 25 years and therefore the entire team is familiar with the scientific literature, all aspects of ongoing research, and the conservation

challenges faced by the government. This has enabled us to communicate research findings and recommendations for conservation action to government officials and the public in a timely and authoritative fashion. For example, the recovery team has overseen the acoustic monitoring effort that allowed us to alert the Government to the catastrophic decline of vaquitas resulting from the resumption of an illegal fishery for a species being traded to China. The international team not only holds the respect of the Government of Mexico and international bodies like the International Whaling Commission but can offer advice quickly as needs arise on pressing fisheries regulation issues.

In my opinion, the conservation of New Zealand's endemic dolphins is being hindered by not adopting such a 'recovery team' approach. This approach is important for species, like Hector's dolphin, that do not come with the kinds of strong economic incentives that fuel fisheries research but that are clearly vulnerable to even low levels and rates of human-caused mortality. Fortunately, your dolphins are relatively easy to study compared with most cetaceans world-wide. They are very accessible to the public and therefore a source of great interest and pride for New Zealanders and also valuable to the ecotourism industry. With some simple management objectives that match public sentiment, Hector's dolphin would be an ideal species around which to develop a comprehensive monitoring program, a program could be overseen on a regular and nearly continuous basis by a recovery team.

In a period when biodiversity faces unprecedented challenges and conservation funding seems more limited than ever, it is increasingly important to use scientific expertise and public enthusiasm and goodwill effectively and efficiently. It is in that spirit that this letter is written.

In conclusion, although this letter presents my own views, as Chair of the Conservation Committee of the Society for Marine Mammalogy I have run this letter past both the Committee and the Society's Board and gotten their support. If you choose to form an international team, the Society would be honored to provide suggested experts.

Sincerely,

Barbara Taylor
Chair of the Conservation Committee
Society of Marine Mammalogy

Cc: Laura Boren
Ben Sharp