

# 1 HECTOMETER FOR THE HECTOR'S DOLPHIN



In just over a week I will try to

break the unassisted freediving world record with an attempt at 100 meters - *one hectometer*.

The dive will be dedicated to the Hector's Dolphin. It is the littlest dolphin in the world, and the only one that is endemic to New Zealand, but the species is threatened with extinction, and a bill being considered by the NZ Minister of Fisheries could determine its fate..

Hector's Dolphins are found only in New Zealand, and only in shallow coastal waters, less than 100 meters deep, putting them at the mercy of gill-net fishing that takes place in those waters. Their population has been reduced by 75% in the last 30 years, and the Maui Dolphin subspecies is teetering on the verge of extinction, with only 100 individuals left.

Despite urgently requiring more protection, the government is actually considering decreasing their sanctuary by reducing the range of coastal waters in which fishing methods that entangle dolphins (gill-nets and trawling) are banned. A decision on this bill, which would be a death warrant to the species, is due to be made by the Minister of Fisheries, Phil Heatley, and Minister of Conservation, Kate Wilkinson, in the next two weeks.

*In a country that prides itself on being at the spearhead of conservation and ecology, and fighting the good fight against international whaling, it would be tragic and embarrassing if New Zealand was unable to take care of the one species of dolphin that belongs to us alone.*

Please, if you have a spare moment, write to the Ministers at the following addresses to discourage them from reducing protection of the Hector's Dolphin - even one sentence will make a difference.

Phil Heatley, Minister of Fisheries: [p.heatley@ministers.govt.nz](mailto:p.heatley@ministers.govt.nz)

Wilkinson, Minister of Conservation: [k.wilkinson@ministers.govt.nz](mailto:k.wilkinson@ministers.govt.nz)

We've set it up so that viewers can support my record attempt by bidding on the individual meters of the 100-metre dive rope, earning memorabilia from the event (go to the VB frontpage to find out more). Provided all meters are sold then 10% of funds raised will be donated to the New Zealand Whale and Dolphin Trust. During press interviews I will be working to increase awareness of the plight of this iconic sea-mammal, and I hope this encourages fisheries and government to make the right decisions to safeguard them against extinction.



When I was an infant, my family sold our house in England to buy a boat and sail from Spain across the Atlantic, Caribbean and Pacific Ocean to New Zealand. Like Hawaiian children, I learnt to swim and walk at the same time, and by the age of 8 I was competing with my older brother Sam to see who could bring back a stone from the deepest depth - we both reached 15 meters. I didn't discover freediving was a sport until eight years ago, when I traveled back to the Caribbean and became hooked, spending hours underwater every day descending the huge coral walls or lying in sunny sand gardens watching the tropical fish.

When I was born in 1980 the world record in 'No Limits' freediving, (down with a sled, up with a lift bag) was 100m, held by Jacques Mayol, who was the subject of Luc Besson's epic film "The Big Blue." Now 30 years old, I find myself about to attempt the same depth in the purest form of the sport, where I won't be able to use any propulsive aids, not even fins. Jacques had a special affinity with dolphins, which is shared by almost everyone who has had the privilege of being in their company in their natural environment. I am lucky enough to have spent time aboard the Dolphin Expeditions liveboard, in Bimini, Bahamas, swimming with the lively

Atlantic Spotted Dolphins.

Though I will never come near to their grace in the water, I hope that my efforts in freediving will help the cause of their threatened cousins, the Hector's Dolphins back, in my homeland of New Zealand.

*photo credits:*

*Hector dolphin: Steve Dawson, NZ Whale & Dolphin Trust*

*William & dolphin: Jillian Rutledge, Dolphin Expeditions*