

Seashore Newsletter



ISSUE THREE: JULY 2007

Welcome to “Seashore Newsletter” - Western Underwater Research Team’s official newsletter which is issued every six months to keep supporters and interested parties up to date with Project news. In this first issue of 2007 we explain our aims, objectives, and where we are at with the survey projects. Details at the back of this newsletter explain how you can help and where you can get more information.

The ‘Western Underwater Research Team’ (WURT) is an established (June 1993) marine environmental group consisting of voluntary supporters, who have an interest in an awareness of the marine environment and its preservation. WURT is a non-profit making group with the members giving freely of their time, skills, and equipment. The personnel within the group are members of the community who are diverse in their interest, occupations, and ages.

Such is the diversity of marine life around New Zealand there is plenty to interest everyone. Utmost is the understanding of coastal dynamics and the effect that human influences has had on these environments. There has been minimal research on species interrelationship within changing habitats and we invite you to be a part of our programme by contributing any interesting observations that you might have experienced whilst diving. We will also discuss how you can assist in the guardianship of our marine environment which, in some areas around New Zealand’s coast has fallen into an unacceptable state. Now we have the almost impossible task to somehow take into account climate change – do you have any comments or ideas to help us on this subject?

News Update

Hi All – thanks for your supporting feedback about the second edition of the ‘Seashore Newsletter’ and if you have any issue(s) that you would like to share with us or a question, please contact us. We are sometimes asked where Western Underwater Research fits in the order of things, as we are not a lobby organization or associated with any institution or national body. Our mission statement is marine conservation through research and although our survey projects are not exactly earth shattering, most of our work has been in supporting marine research projects and / or with other groups.

Marine Bio security - Update:

Brendan Gould of Biosecurity New Zealand (BNZ) emailed comments about January’s 2007 ‘Seashore Newsletter’ article on marine bio security – see below.

“Thanks for forwarding this newsletter on. I have circulated it among the wider marine group across BNZ and to our comms team. I have to admit it was refreshing to read an article that takes a pragmatic view of the difficulties facing the management of marine bio security, even though frustrations are evident.

A couple of years ago BNZ also started a research programme to attempt to quantify the bio fouling (hull fouling) risks associated with a range of international visiting marine vessel, recreational yachts, barges and we are also attempting to look at oil platforms and their support vessels. While the sampling is almost complete the processing and identification is no easy task, given the limited number of taxonomist in New Zealand (and internationally for that matter) and the huge volume of samples coming in from arrange of range of marine bio security projects. The analysis of the results will be sometime off yet.

The purpose of the above project is to facilitate the development of border controls in the form of import health standards. In short these need to be defensible and based on a justifiable level of risk, once this work is complete, we hope to develop the appropriate standards to support controls of hull fouling on international vessels, and then look at how this could be applied domestically as well. To give a bit of perspective, this hull fouling research is the first such research being undertaken in the world. We have also initiated and are driving discussions within the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to address hull fouling / bio fouling as an issue at an international level hopefully through the development of an international convention” – thanks Brendan for your comments.

Projects Update

One of the objectives of the Research Team is to bring awareness of local and national marine environment issues to the community through such things as exhibits and guest speaker presentations. To date this year, the Research Team has exhibited at two events – Waitakere City Council 'Ecoday' and the 'Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show'. Thanks to the Lottery Grants and the Lion Foundation the Research Team has two impressive display units. On each event we have had support from such organisations as the Ministry of Fisheries, Department of Conservation, Dive New Zealand Magazine, PADI Project AWARE (Asia Pacific), Dive HQ (West Auckland), Premiere Exhibitions Ltd, Project Seahorse and Biosecurity New Zealand. Funding organizations such as the Portage Trust and Pub Charities have given us the funding to purchase presentation equipment which has also been successfully used at such events.

Thanks to Dave Gibbs (Premiere Exhibitions Ltd), the Research Team was again given a very good exhibition site at the 'Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show' and due to timing we were able to launch a Maui's dolphin awareness poster – funded by the Mazda Foundation. Also on display was a feature on 'Pollen Island in Black and White' showing volunteer work with Pollen Island (Waitamata Harbour); a display featuring 'Survey Seahorse 2000' and the 'New Zealand Recreational Diver Survey'. Special thanks go to the Department of Conservation for letting us use a life size model of a Hector's / Maui's dolphin – very popular with both children and adults. We also have to thank 'Antics Marketing' for a sale and return fund raiser of soft toys and for supporting Maui's dolphin research by a royalty on each Maui's / Hector dolphin soft toy sold. To support the Maui's / Hector dolphin soft toy research fund raiser the Research team will set-up a Maui's dolphin web site.

The overall response from the public was noticeably supportive about our research work, and especially regarding comments made about supporting the ban on set netting. As a group, it is difficult at times, to be neutral from the politics of such issues, but it is encouraging that since the set net ban along the west coast of the North Island was imposed, no dolphin species has been found dead or alive that has shown signs of having entanglement with a set net. A sad story was told to me by Jim Lilley who took and data based photographs of all Hector's and Maui's dolphin carcasses, of how the Hector's



Waitakere City Council – Ecoday.

model pictured above was actually modeled from a dead animal (see picture below – rear dolphin.)



Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show – from the left Daniel Hayes, Mark Stoneman (WURT volunteers) and Ciaran Edwards (DoC).

model pictured above was actually modeled from a dead animal (see picture below – rear dolphin.)

Although set nets are the main cause of death of Hector's and Maui's dolphins with regard to human involvement, there are, however, a very large percentage of dolphins found with no answer to how they died. Like most of the cetacean family, each dolphin species lives a different and complex social life and for the Maui's dolphin this needs to be urgently researched and the information factored into a protection management plan. Some interesting information came out of the 'Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show' from two people from Hawke's Bay with sighting information of Hector's dolphins seen recently South of Napier near Paoanui Point and Pourerere. Interestingly, it does seem that Hector's dolphins have been observed



Two dead Hector's dolphins – the front dolphin has cuts on its side dorsal fins caused by an entanglement with some sort of net.

on the East coast of the North Island making it open for all sorts of speculation. One theory is that a small number of Hector's dolphins cross over from the South Island to winter, which according to the experts that should not happen, but it does make sense why a small number of dolphins have survived the passage of time. Where as, if, they had been resident they would have been wiped out by the regions pressures along time ago. This would make a great research project and who knows what interesting information would come out of it – they could turn out to be another Hector's dolphin sub species, now wouldn't that be interesting.

Projects Update

Survey Seahorse 2000:

Sometimes we read in the news something that turns our stomachs over and without exception Christchurch's RMF Nutraceuticals fall into that unsavoury category by being fined \$10,000 for illegally importing a 25kg drum of seahorse powder without a permit. Dean Ruse (RMF Nutraceuticals) thought the importation of the seahorse powder without a certificate was legal. Judge John Bisphan considered it unlikely a permit would have been granted and commented that the uncertified importation to be an oversight by the company rather than anything sinister – I let you be the judge on those comments. The Research Team has for been involved for more than ten years supporting the conservation of seahorses in the wild both here in New Zealand and overseas and we get very disheartened when we read that a New Zealand company goes this way. It was estimated that 65,000 seahorses were killed to produce the powder that made up half the contents of the drum. The company had also imported seahorse powder in 2000, but this was before all seahorse species were listed as threatened.

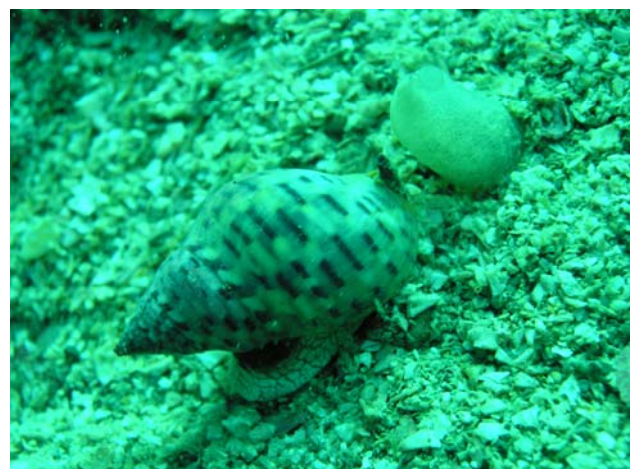
On a lighter front we had a very interesting seahorse sighting to add to our database from G Joyce of Matakana who, after talking to us at our stand at this year's 'Hutchwilco New Zealand Boat Show', kindly filled out and returned one of our 'Survey Seahorse 2000' forms. He reported that back in 1957 whilst snorkelling with his family at Port Underwood (North East coast of the South Island) they found the area teeming with seahorses both large and small. It is not unusual to see small numbers of seahorses together but large numbers is quite exceptional. We have very little data going back to the fifties but what information we do have does show that seahorses were observed in much greater numbers. Unfortunately we don't have enough information to base an opinion as to why seahorse numbers have declined, and it could be for a number of reasons, but it does concern us. If you have any information about seahorse sightings please contact us or you could fill out a survey form, obtainable from our web site – contact details are on the back page.

New Zealand Recreational Diver Survey (NZRDS):

It's always good to get out and conduct a survey dive and sometimes it turns out to be quite memorable. We have, for a number of years, been conducting NZDRS surveys around Tiritiri Matangi Island. We have three survey sites – Little Wooded Island, Fisherman's Bay and Shearer Rock. The last Fisherman's Bay site survey (May) brought up some interesting data and was also used to test underwater communication equipment. On the way back to the boat ramp at Whangaparaoa's Army Bay we were treated to seeing a pod of seven Common Grey dolphins. We have found the conditions of the marine environment at the survey sites to vary – noting down at times Kina *Evechinus chioroticus* and introduced Parchment tube worm infestations, brown algae and kelp die-off. It would be safe to say that the conditions could be greatly improved with better water quality and one obvious cause is continuation to release partly treated and / or diluted sewage along Auckland's coastline – Auckland City still has about 230 designed overflows sending diluted sewage into the sea during heavy rain.



This picture taken at Fisherman's Bay by Paul Aked, shows clearly an area being stripped by Kina.



Picture taken at Fisherman's Bay by Paul Aked of an unknown species of Gastropod.

The management of land development run-off has been greatly improved over the years and it will probably take many years to see the benefits. Kina infestations can be caused by the lack of predators such as Snapper *Chrysophrys auratus*. This again highlights a need to improve the current management of coastal fisheries.

Ron Steven (Rogest) Print Presentations:

A number of Ron Steven (Rogest) prints were presented to individuals and organizations in appreciation of their continuing support. The last 'Rogest' print to be presented 'Looking at Extinction' was to the New Zealand Underwater Association (NZUA) at their 54th AGM held at the Western Underwater Dive Club (host club) for services to the marine environment. Also a special presentation of a cheque was made by Dave Moran (Editor of Dive New Zealand Magazine) to the Western Underwater Research Team – the cheque was the proceeds of the Ron Steven 'Rogest' print auctions. Mike Percy (Research Team's Chairperson) received the cheque and he thanked Dave and all the staff of Dive New Zealand Magazine for their wonderful support. The proceeds will go directly into supporting the Research Team's NZRDS projects. Special thanks also go to Ron Steven for his support, without which all this would not be possible.



From the left Dave Moran (Editor of Dive NZ) presenting a cheque to Mike Percy (Research Team's Chairperson)

NZUA (AGM) presentation talk 'Extinction is forever':

Recently the Research Team has been asked to give talks relating to its involvement with the marine environment. One presentation done by Mike Percy on the Maui's dolphin was to the Auckland City branch of the Royal Forest and Bird Protection Society. The other, entitled 'Extinction is forever' was presented by Mike Percy at the NZUA AGM.

As part of the obligation to play an active part in the decision making process the Research Team is a stakeholder to a number of marine issues and has, for example, recently been representative in discussions about the Hector's and Maui's dolphin 'Threat Management Discussion Document'. It is extremely important for all the community as well as stakeholders to play an active part in the preservation of the environment.

**"Vision without action is a dream.
Action without vision is simply passing the time.
Action with Vision is making a positive difference."** – Joel Barker.

Hope you have found our 'Seashore Newsletter' informative. Special thanks to the Western Underwater Dive Club, Dive HQ (West Auckland), Portage Licensing Trust, Pub Charity Inc, Lion Foundation, New Zealand Lottery Grants Board, Mazda Foundation, New Zealand Community Post, Dive New Zealand Magazine.

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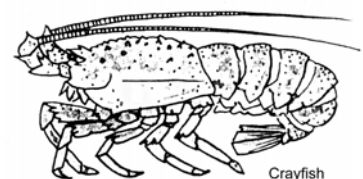
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Lynn Taylor (NZUA President 2006) accepting a framed 'Rogest' Print 'Looking at Extinction'.

Illustration by John Walsby



Crayfish