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Resumption of traditional drive hunting of dolphins in the Solomon Islands in 2013

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1. Summary

The 'drive hunting' of dolphins has a long history in the Solomon Islands, specifically on the island of Malaita. In 2010, the most active village, Funafeti, suspended hunting in exchange for financial compensation from an international non-governmental organization but resumed hunting again in early 2013. Here, we report on a visit to Funafeti in March 2013 to document the species and number of dolphins killed in the resumed hunting. Detailed records for the 2013 hunting, up to the time of our visit, included at least 1500 postropical spotted dolphins (*Stenella attenuata*), 170 spinner dolphins (*Stenella longirostris*) and 15 'bottlenose' dolphins, probably *Tursiops truncatus*. Molecular identification confirmed two of the species, postropical spotted and spinner dolphins. A summary of all available records from 1976 to 2013 documented a minimum total of 35 456 dolphins killed by the Funafeti villagers alone. We also found the local price of a dolphin tooth had increased from about US\$60–14 (S\$1961) in 2004 to about US\$60–70 (S\$1967) in 2013. The large number of dolphins killed and the apparent incentive for future hunting offered by the increasing commercial value of teeth, highlight an urgent need to monitor hunts and assess the abundance and trends in local populations.

2. Introduction

The Solomon Islands, in the western South Pacific, are well known for the practice of dolphin hunting, where hunters use unique traditional techniques to drive schools from the offshore into shallow coastal waters [1–3]. Hunters operate in close coordination from 20 to 30 traditional canoes and, when dolphins are found, clap together rounded stones to create a percussive underwater sound [3]. The hunters manoeuvre the

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