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***The Last of Maui's Dolphins* by Maria Gill illustrated by Bruce Potter**

Publisher: New Holland Publishers (NZ)

RRP \$19.99

An appealing picture book with a serious message about the plight of the endangered Maui's dolphin.

The story opens with the birth of Hiriwa, and the loss of another Maui's dolphin from the pod on the same day. Hiriwa's mother keeps careful watch over her young calf and warns him not to go near the dark shapes that float on the surface of the ocean.

As he grows, Hiriwa begins to explore the sea around him with his friends Spotty the snapper, Squiggles the octopus, and Puru the penguin. But danger is never far away. When his friends are caught in a trawler's net, Hiriwa is determined to rescue them even though he puts himself in grave danger.

The heart of the story focuses on friendship and courage yet, without detracting from the dramatic tale, the author skilfully includes many details about the rare Maui's dolphin. A double-spread of fact pages at the end gives more information about this unique species.

The evocative illustrations capture the underwater scenes with slanting light and dappled shades of sea colours. The marine species are accurately portrayed, although their expressive eyes display their emotions.

Young readers will enjoy this educational and entertaining introduction to one of New Zealand's rare dolphins. The stitched binding adds to the durability of the quality, paperback publication.

Reviewed by children's book author Jean Bennett

Author's website:

<http://www.mariagill.co.nz/>

