



Pelorus Jack

Pelorus Jack was a Risso Dolphin (*Grampus griseus*) who became famous in the late 19th and early 20th century for guiding ships through French Pass. Risso dolphins are a beakless species and are quite rare in New Zealand.

Pelorus Jack's name is said to have developed from 'Pelorus Sound' and from the common name for a seaman, a 'jacktar'.

Although no one ever came close enough to verify this, it was often speculated, that Jack could actually be a female.

His popularity in New Zealand grew, so much so that people travelled to Nelson just to get a glimpse of this fascinating mammal. In 1910 his fame ventured outside New Zealand – when he featured on the cover of the Christmas issue of the *London News*.

In 1904 an incident occurred. Although it was never confirmed, many people believe that someone aboard the *Penguin* shot at Pelorus Jack from the bow, with a rifle as he accompanied the vessel. Thankfully the bullet missed him, but according to folklore Pelorus Jack never again accompanied the vessel. This incident may have had no bearing on the decision, but in 1904 a ruling was made by A Government Order-in-council to protect Risso dolphins in Cook Strait.

After 1912 he appeared to have vanished, many believe he passed away due to natural causes as Pelorus would have been at least 25 years old, which is the average lifespan of a Risso dolphin. According to Maori legend, Pelorus Jack was a taniwha sent by the ocean god (Tangaroa) to guide and watch over Kupe (the first explorer to Wellington). Legend says that taniwha can rest on the bottom of the ocean for long periods of time waiting to be called to by the ocean god. Many choose to believe this is the reason why we have not seen Pelorus Jack escorting and cavorting with boats for quite some time!

Acknowledgements: *The Wreck of the Penguin*, Bruce E. Collins, Steele Roberts Publishers.