

# Incredible photos show pod of around 450 dusky dolphins off Kaikōura coast



By **David Williams**

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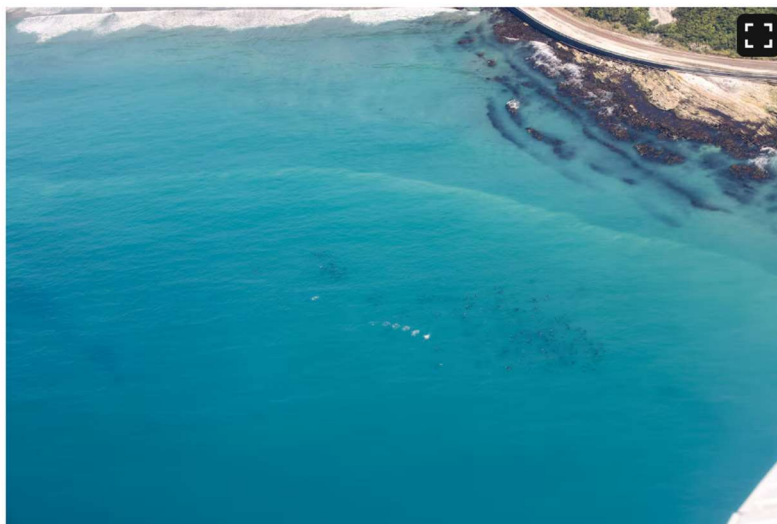
Christchurch pilot Chris Lierheimer spotted a pod of approximately 450 dolphins while flying over the Kaikōura coast. Photo / Chris Lierheimer

A Christchurch pilot had the encounter of a lifetime when he flew over a pod of approximately 450 dolphins swimming off the [Kaikōura](#) coast.

[Christchurch](#) Aero Club member Chris Lierheimer was flying from Hastings to Rangiora when the pilot of his aircraft spotted a large group of dolphins.

“We decided to turn around and make a few orbits to get a better look.”

He estimated the dolphins were 500 metres to a kilometre off the coast.



Christchurch pilot Chris Lierheimer estimated the dolphins were between 500m and 1km from the shore. Photo / Chris Lierheimer

“It was a lot of movement. There were a couple of them who were jumping in pretty regular patterns so we could see the white water in pretty regular intervals,” Lierheimer said.

“Most of them were quite close to the surface, so it was quite easy to make out individual dolphins.

“We were probably about 2000 feet above the surface of the water, so it made for a really nice perspective to see the whole pod at once.”

The Christchurch resident said his heart rate went up when the plane first flew over the dolphins, and he was able to retrieve his camera.

“Any time you encounter marine life, especially in a group that big, it can be quite emotional,” he said.

“To realise there are other large groups of wild animals out there and there are other creatures in this world that deserve to share it with us.”

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[Department of Conservation](#) senior science advisor Dave Lundquist said these were very likely to be dusky dolphins.

“They are frequently found near shore at Kaikōura in pods of several hundred animals,” he said.

“Pods of over 1000 animals are sighted every year off Kaikōura, and there are reports in the scientific literature of offshore sightings of multiple thousands of dusky dolphins in a single pod.”

**David Williams is an Auckland-based Multimedia Journalist who joined the Herald in 2023. He covers breaking news and general topics.**