

# Cousteau joins hunt for orcas

5:00AM Tuesday July 01, 2008-NEW ZEALAND HERALD

By [Phoebe Falconer](#)



Jean-Michel Cousteau says orcas are easy to tell apart. Photo / AP

The great orca hunt is on.

Jean-Michel Cousteau is, like his late father Jacques-Yves Cousteau, an ocean explorer. He is in New Zealand this month to find and film orcas, or killer whales, using the experience and contacts of whale researcher Dr Ingrid Visser.

Orcas are the largest species of the oceanic dolphin family, and this is the time of year to spot them, said Dr Visser.

"Because it's cold, they come in closer to shore to hunt rays for food."

Dr Visser relies on the public to help spot orcas. "We have an 0800 number, and people just ring and let us know where they are."

Mr Cousteau, his son Fabien and a crew of seven hope to establish a pattern of orca migration worldwide, to discover why the creatures in Papua New Guinea display similar characteristics to those found in New Zealand waters. The similarities include feeding habits and behavioural practices.

Although the creatures are not tagged, there are ways of identifying them that make tracking possible.

"They are noticeably different to each other. Some have scars and scratches from fighting, and they have ways of behaving that sort out one from another. They are just like humans, really," said Mr Cousteau.

Filming the black and white mammals has taken the team to British Columbia and Alaska, as well as Papua New Guinea. Later in the year they hope to go to Norway.

Although he has not worked with Dr Visser before, he has been to New Zealand many times. While in New Zealand they will be based in Northland and Auckland.

Mr Cousteau runs the Ocean Futures Society, an organisation which promotes the importance of wise environmental policy. His most recent film, *Return to the Amazon*, records the devastation and damage done to the river in the past 20 years.

He is based in California, from where he works with organisations such as Green Cross International on issues of global water security, protection of sensitive marine areas and the prevention of oil spills.

Cousteau the younger no longer has any involvement with the Cousteau Society, set up by his father in 1973 to raise funds for ocean exploration, research and exploration.

**\* The hotline for orca sightings is 0800 See Orca (0800 733 6722)**