



# The Hon Niall Blair MLC Minister for Primary Industries Minister for Lands and Water

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## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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Thursday 13 May 2015

### **TRIAL TO REDUCE TURTLE DEATHS IN PORT STEPHENS**

Minister for Primary Industries Niall Blair today announced the commencement of an innovative trial to help reduce the number of turtles being caught in crab catching equipment in the Port Stephens area.

Mr Blair said the trial would require recreational fishers in Port Stephens to modify witches hats and some crab traps to limit unintentional interactions with turtles.

“While crabbing is a popular and important recreational fishing activity in the Port Stephens area, the higher than usual incidence of turtle drowning calls for some innovative action,” Mr Blair said.

“This new trial will require simple but effective modifications to some gear including witches hats to operate as lift nets, whereas traditionally small buoys above the net have been used by recreational fishers to invert the entanglement mesh when set.

“Since 2011, about 16 turtles have been found drowned in Port Stephens as a result of entanglement mostly in recreational crab trapping fishing gear, known as witches hats and rectangular collapsible traps.”

The new rules are the best approach to reducing the likelihood of turtles drowning while still enabling recreational fishers to catch crabs.

Hoop or lift nets will not be permitted to be set between sunset and sunrise, which will reduce the potential for this gear to be lost overnight.

Crab traps with wide entrances have also been associated with a number of turtle drownings and there is now a requirement for the maximum entrance width of crab traps not to exceed 32 centimetres.

This means crabs can enter the trap but will restrict entry of such non-target species as turtles.

The new rules commence immediately, with a one-month advisory period to ensure fishers are aware of the changes.