

WORKING SAFELY IN COMMERCIAL ESTUARY FISHING

The tragic death of a commercial estuary fisher in June this year has highlighted the risks that can be faced in the industry.

To support the sector, WorkCover, DPI, RMS and industry representatives are combining to ensure that fishers have the information and support they need to work safely.

A series of free information sessions will be held in key fishing areas along the coast north of Sydney, so that fishers are informed of safe work practices, their options for working safely and how they can get assistance if they need it.

This newsletter includes guidance for fishers on safe work practice and vessel safety as well as providing clarification of some of the estuary related Fisheries Regulations.

Fisheries Regulations

The role of fisheries regulations is to carefully manage fish stocks to ensure healthy resources for current and future generations and promote the long term security and viability of the fishing industry.

At the moment, one of the main ways of making sure the commercial harvest of fish in estuaries is sustainable is by limiting how many people can do different activities. That is why there are limits on the number of endorsements in each fishery. This is especially important in the Estuary General fishery because two or three people working the gear can make a notable difference to the efficiency of the operation and catches compared to a fisher working alone. Limits on crew are less important in many boat-based ocean fisheries where the boats and gear used (and knowledge of the skipper of course) affect the efficiency and catch more than the number of people on board.

Some discussions have been held amongst estuary fishers about the rules which prohibit the use of unlicensed crew in Estuary General fishing, with some claiming they are causing safety risks. It is important that you understand the options available that allow you to fish in a safe way. Under the current fisheries regulations, the following options are available to you to reduce the safety risks while fishing:

1. Work with or alongside another endorsed fisher. There are no restrictions on how many endorsed fishers work together, so if you are worried about working your gear or unloading your fish alone, seek the help of another endorsed fisher;
2. Local Fisheries Officers can give you authority to carry another person on board your boat, provided they don't assist with the actual fishing operation. This authority can be given in writing, in person or over the phone.

This enables you to take friends, family members or other persons on board who don't have a licence or an appropriate endorsement, to observe and be there if safety issues arise (e.g. if adverse weather is forecast). Fisheries Officers will only generally refuse such authorities if there is a history of it being abused or you or the person you are seeking to take aboard pose an unacceptable risk of flouting the law. We encourage you to talk to your local Fisheries Officer to confirm the requirements and discuss your particular circumstances.

3. When it comes down to it, you are the only person who can really decide whether it is safe to go fishing on any particular day. Factors which increase the safety risk include weather conditions, fatigue, whether you have existing injuries, the state of the boats and gear, how prepared you are, etc. If any or a combination of these factors are a concern, the best decision you can make is to

decide not to go fishing or take extra precautions to make sure you don't put yourself or others in a dangerous situation. Your safety is most important.

Can the current fisheries regulations for the Estuary General fishery be changed?

Without putting other management arrangements in place, the current licensing/crew rules in the Estuary General fishery will remain. However, you should be aware of the reform program underway which provides an opportunity to modify these and other restrictions that impact upon how estuary fishers operate. The form and strength of the share linkage arrangements will ultimately determine what changes can be made to the existing rules. The crewing issue in Estuary General has already been raised as an option to be worked through during the reform program.

The consultation process for the reforms is well underway. Every fisher can submit ideas and options at any stage and all shareholders will be sent a shortlist of options for comment early next year. You are encouraged to get involved and provide constructive input and ideas into the process. Go to www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/commercial/reform or contact NSW DPI for more details.

Vessel safety and other requirements

It is critical that commercial fishing vessels meet the required standards to ensure they are not only safe but offer a reliable and efficient fishing platform. The following are the minimum requirements:

- ◆ Ensure that your vessel is registered
- ◆ You must hold the appropriate licence for the vessel type you operate

A new national system for domestic commercial vessel safety came into effect on 1 July 2013. From this date all new operators of commercial vessels in NSW waterways must have and implement a Safety Management Plan (SMP) as identified in the National Standard for Commercial Vessels (NSCV) Part E. Further information and links to documents can be found at the Australian Maritime Safety Authority www.amsa.gov.au.

If you have an older safety management system or plan you should review and update this to the new standard.

General fishing safety

Before you head out on the water, consider these simple tips:

- ◆ Check that your vessel is in good condition.
- ◆ Check that you have all the required safety equipment on board (see attached safety equipment table).
- ◆ Ensure all safety equipment is in good condition and easily accessible in the event of an emergency and everybody aboard knows its location.
- ◆ Report your trip. Let someone know where you are going, how many people are on board and when you intend to return.
- ◆ Make sure you and your crew know how to handle the boat, especially on the waterway that you're using. If in doubt, get information from locals or Roads and Maritime Services.
- ◆ Check the weather before you go out. Don't go out if in doubt.
- ◆ Register for a Maritime Alert system based on official weather data.
- ◆ Make sure you have sufficient water and fuel for the duration of the trip.
- ◆ Wear your lifejacket particularly when crossing bars or working alone or in isolated areas.
- ◆ Have an emergency response process in place and consider EPIRBS and other equipment that can assist in emergency situations.

Information Sessions



















A series of Information sessions for fishers are to be held at Gosford, Newcastle (Broadmeadow), Forster, Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and Yamba during January 2014. The sessions will be a great way to get free advice.

Date	Time	Location
Monday 13 January 2014	10.00am - 1:00pm	Central Coast Leagues Club Dane Drive, Gosford NSW 2250
Wednesday 15 January 2014	10.00am - 1:00pm	Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service Bavin Road, Broadmeadow NSW 2292
Friday 17 January 2014	10.00am - 1:00pm	Club Forster 19 Strand Street, Forster NSW 2428
Monday 20 January 2014	10.00am - 1:00pm	Panthers - Port Macquarie 1 Bay Street, Port Macquarie NSW 2444
Wednesday 22 January 2014	10.00am - 1:00pm	Coffs Harbour Ex Services Club Vernon Street, Coffs Harbour NSW 2450
Friday 24 January 2014	10.00am - 1:00pm	Yamba Bowling Club 44 Woolli Street, Yamba NSW 2464

Small businesses attending the free information sessions may be eligible to receive up to \$500 to help become smarter and safer through WorkCover's small business rebate program.

Managing Risk in the fishing industry

SAFETY EQUIPMENT

Symbol	Item	Quantity
	Lifejacket Type 1 , 2 or 3	1 per person*
	Lifejacket Type 1	
	Anchor and chain/line	1
	Bailer/Bucket (vessel with open bilges) or Bilge pump (vessels with covered bilges)	1 1**
	Compass (magnetic)	
	Distress signal - orange smoke hand-held distress flare	
	Distress signal - red hand-held distress flare	
	EPIRB - 406MHz (required if two nautical miles or more offshore)	
	Fire bucket (if no bailing bucket carried suitable for fire fighting)	1
	Fire extinguisher (vessels with electric start, electric motors, gas or fuel stoves)	1**
	Map/chart of area (paper not electronic)	
	Marine radio (required of two nautical miles or more offshore)	
	Paddle or oars/rowlocks in vessels under 6m unless a second means of propulsion is fitted.	1
	Safety Label	1
	Sound signal (air horn/whistle/bell)	1
	V sheet (orange)	
	Water (suitable for drinking)	
	Waterproof torch (floating)	1
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* Lifejackets must be suitable for the intended wearer, in good condition, accessible, and inflatable units serviced in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions.

** Additional bilge pumps and fire extinguishers may be required for larger vessels.

**NAVIGATION LIGHTS MUST BE DISPLAYED BETWEEN SUNSET
& SUNRISE & DURING TIMES OF RESTRICTED VISIBILITY**