

10 October 2022

Proposed amendment to commercial fishing regulations

Consultation paper 14

Estuary General Fishery – bait nets

Overview of activity

A bait net may only be used in the lower reaches of the Macleay River by fishers who hold a category one or category two hauling endorsement. There are 10 category one and 8 category two hauling endorsement holders in this region that may use this net.

The net is specifically designed to catch Whitebait (Sandy Sprat), a small seasonal bait species only occasionally taken in the Macleay River. Commercial landings of Whitebait in NSW (all waters) average about 100 tonnes per annum, with the vast majority taken in the Ocean Hauling Fishery.

Fishers who hold a category 1 or category 2 hauling endorsement are subject to effort quota – limiting the number of days each fisher may work each year. From 2024, the Total Allowable Effort (TAE) that applies will be periodically reviewed by the independent Total Allowable Fishing Committee or the Secretary of Department of Regional NSW. Catch in this sector may be managed by adjusting the TAE or species-specific controls.

Current arrangement

The mesh size for a bait net must be between 13 and 25 mm.

Proposed change

Reduce the minimum mesh size for the bait net from 13 mm to 10 mm to accommodate the netting material currently available on the market.

What is the problem being resolved?

The proposed change would address the low availability of netting material with mesh 13 mm or slightly greater.

Outcomes

The proposed change would deliver the following outcomes and benefits:

- Access to readily available net suitable for Whitebait
 - Cost savings for fishers with old nets that have shrunk and are now below the legal size (13 mm)
 - Reduced red-tape that may be inhibiting local supply of Whitebait
 - No discernible impact on fisheries resources or the environment
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