

10 October 2022

Proposed amendment to commercial fishing regulations

Consultation paper 10

Estuary General Fishery – prawn set pocket nets

Overview of activity

The prawn set pocket net may only be used in nine estuaries in NSW (tidal waters only), subject to marine park, aquatic reserve, and fisheries spatial controls by fishers who hold a prawning endorsement. The prawn set pocket net is a passive net used to take School Prawn with little if any bycatch issues. Catch in this sector may be managed by adjusting numbers of endorsements (or fishers) on a regional and as-needs basis.

Current arrangement

Maximum length: The maximum length for a prawn set pocket net used in Lake Illawarra and Tuggerah Lakes is 5 metres.

The maximum net lengths that apply likely reflects the size of nets that fishers were using or wanted to use when the prawn set pocket net was regulated, many decades ago.

Attending nets: A prawn set pocket net must not be left unattended while the net is set.

The requirement to attend a net is in place to support fishers periodically securing exclusive access to designated prawning sites (through a process known as a prawn ballot).

Proposed change

Maximum length: Increase the maximum length for a prawn set pocket net used in Lake Illawarra and Tuggerah Lakes to 6 metres, consistent with the maximum length that applies to the hand hauled prawn net used by commercial and recreational fishers.

Attending nets: Remove the requirement for a net to be attended but require nets to be marked with a buoy for identification purposes consistent with other set fishing gear. In many cases, a fisher will not leave a net unless necessary.

What is the problem being resolved?

In recent years, management of the Estuary General Fishery, including the prawn sector, has changed with endorsement numbers significantly reduced. Maintaining outdated controls that limit fishers' options imposes unnecessary restrictions that:

- Stop fishers enhancing efficiency and profit by using a slightly longer net
 - Stop fishers leaving their nets for personal, emergency, or other reasons
 - Impose inconsistencies when using set fishing gear (other set gear is not always attended)
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- Impose a burden on government maintaining, communicating, and enforcing rules that present limited benefit to fisheries resources and the community
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Outcomes

The proposed change would deliver the following outcomes and benefits:

- Improve fishing efficiency (and profit)
- Social and safety benefits for fishers by being able to leave a net for a short period
- Improve consistency with the other set fishing gear
- Redundant provisions removed and red tape reduced
- No discernible impact on fisheries resources or the environment

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