

10 October 2022

# Proposed amendment to commercial fishing regulations

## Consultation paper 7

### *Ocean Hauling & Estuary General fisheries – general purpose hauling nets*

#### Overview of activity

The general purpose (GP) hauling net may be used in the Estuary General Fishery and the Ocean Hauling Fishery:

- The Estuary General Fishery operates in 76 of the 140 or so estuaries in NSW (tidal waters only) subject to marine park, aquatic reserve, and fisheries spatial controls. 102 fishers hold a category one hauling endorsement authorising use of a GP hauling net in this fishery. Fishers who hold a category 1 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.
- The Ocean Hauling Fishery operates from sea beaches and in inshore ocean waters subject to marine park, aquatic reserve, and fisheries spatial controls. 60 fishers hold a hauling net (general purpose) endorsement authorising use this net in this fishery. Catch in this fishery may be managed by adjusting numbers of endorsement holders (or fishers) on a regional and as-needs basis or species specific controls.

A hauling net has various parts including hauling lines, wings and a bunt, which consists of a centre piece and two ‘shoulders’ located either side (Figure 1). The hauling lines and wings guide fish towards the bunt where they accumulate and where most of the selectivity<sup>1</sup> occurs.

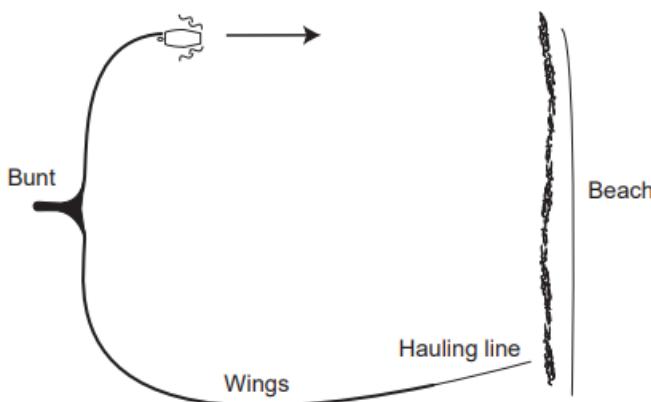


Figure 1: diagram of a general purpose hauling net, showing a hauling line, wing, and the bunt

The GP hauling net has been used in NSW estuaries since post-colonial days and must be operated with the assistance of at least one other person. It is used to take species including Mullet, Luderick, Yellowfin Bream, Sand Whiting, and Silver Biddy.

## Current arrangement

**Bunt position:** In the Ocean Hauling Fishery the bunt must be in the centre of the net, or between the end of the net shot first and the centre of the net. In the Estuary General Fishery, the bunt must be in the centre of the net.

The location of the bunt in a net is a long-standing arrangement but modified over time in the Ocean Hauling Fishery to suite the way that fishers use the net.

**Removal of catch:** In the Ocean Hauling and Estuary General fisheries, fish contained in any part of the net must be removed on completion of the haul, or on removal of that part of the net from the water, whichever occurs first.

The requirement to remove catch from a net in a timely fashion is a relatively new arrangement introduced in the mid 2000's to ensure and to demonstrate industry's commitment to minimise its impact on the environment optimise the quality of catch retained for sale.

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## Proposed change

**Bunt location:** Standardise the rules governing the location of a bunt in a GP hauling net across both fisheries and give fishers greater flexibility by allowing the bunt to be positioned anywhere in a net.

The bunt is where fish accumulate and where most of the selectivity occurs, so the location of the bunt should not impact the overall selectivity of the net.

**Removal of catch:** Remove the second half of the current arrangement so that fish must be removed on completion of the haul, rather than from each part of a net as it is removed from the water.

The priority for fishers using a GP hauling net is the safe operation of the net, particularly in strong tide or on waves affected beaches, closely followed by the removal of fish from the net.

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## What is the problem being resolved?

These somewhat prescriptive rules are unnecessary restrictions that:

- Complicate the regulations
- Impose inconsistencies in the way nets must be constructed
- Impose costs by limiting opportunity to use a single net in both fisheries
- Impose limitation on net design (shorter wings) for fishing tight locations and certain species
- Do not recognise that fishers already try to remove fish from nets as soon as practicable to optimise product quality and reduce discard mortality
- Have the potential to divert fishers' focus from the safe operation of a net
- Impose a burden on government maintaining and enforcing rules that present limited benefits

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## Outcomes

The proposed change would deliver the following outcomes and benefits:

- Improve consistency across fisheries, potentially reducing fishing gear related costs
- Efficiency when working certain locations and harvesting certain species
- Improved safety and product quality and reduced discard mortality (by retrieval a net quickly)
- Reduce risk of enforcement action for non-compliance with highly prescriptive regulation

- Redundant provisions removed, red-tape reduced, and reduced burden on government
- No discernible impact on the fisheries resource and environment No discernible impact on fisheries resources or the environment

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