

10 October 2022

Proposed amendment to commercial fishing regulations

Consultation paper 15

Estuary General Fishery – eel traps

Overview of activity

An eel trap may only be used by holders of an eel trapping endorsement in the Estuary General Fishery, which operates in 76 of the 140 or so estuaries in NSW (tidal waters only) subject to fisheries spatial controls. 90 fishers are endorsed to use eel traps to take Longfin River Eel and Shortfin River Eel. The quantity of eel allowed to be taken is managed by quotas and from 2024 the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for these species will be periodically reviewed by the independent Total Allowable Fishing Committee or the Secretary of Department of Regional NSW.

Live eels are primarily taken for the export market, but there is also a small domestic market. Minimising damage to eels is essential for their survival and to maximise profit. Damaged eels are sometimes rejected by exporters.

Current arrangement

The mesh size for an eel trap must be between 20 mm and 50 mm.

Proposed change

Reduce the minimum mesh size for the eel trap to 15 mm to minimise damage to eels.

What is the problem being resolved?

The proposed changes would address the following problems or issues:

- Eels damage their head when they push their head through the meshes in a trap to escape, sometimes reducing survival rates but often impacting sale and profits
 - If an eel dies or is rejected by a buyer and discarded, the fisher is not reimbursed quota
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Outcomes

The proposed change would deliver the following outcomes and benefits:

- Improved product quality, business efficiency, and profitability
 - No change to the number of eels caught because quotas apply
 - Reduce red-tape for fishers
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- No discernible impact on fisheries resources or the environment given the small change to the minimum mesh size (from 20 to 15 mm) and requirement for trap entrance funnels to be fitted with 100 mm rings to prevent air breathing animals and turtles entering a trap

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