

28 JAN 1994

GRETA POINT

SET NET

CODE OF PRACTICE

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MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES
TE MANATU AHUWHENUA AHUMOANA

New Zealand Fisheries Information Series No. 28

A GUIDE TO GOOD NETTING

Set netting is a commonly used fishing method around the coast of New Zealand. To avoid problems associated with set nets it is important that the nets are used properly.

Poor netting practices can cause fish wastage, the bycatch of unwanted fish species, lost or abandoned nets which continue to fish, and, on rare occasions, a catch of seabirds or marine mammals.

These problems can usually be avoided. The catch and bycatch of set nets are determined mainly by the design and construction (particularly the mesh size) of the net, how it is set, and where it is set.

Following a review of set net fisheries, the fishing laws were changed recently to improve set netting practices. This set net code of practice is intended to complement the existing law by encouraging fishers to fish safely and competently.



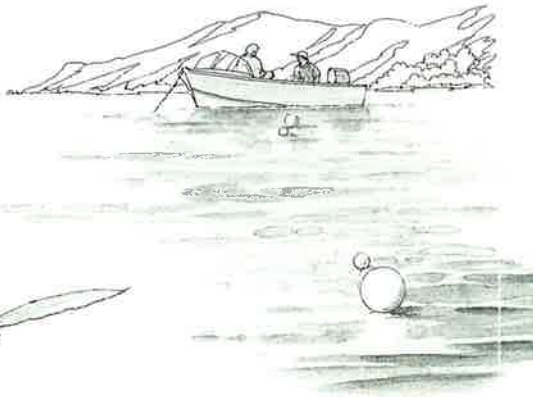
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SET NET LAWS

Before you go fishing, you will need to know the amateur fishing regulations. These are available free of charge from your local MAF Fisheries office. The main laws that apply nationally to amateur set netting are:

- 1 Any net or nets used either individually or jointly must not extend more than a quarter of the way across any bay, channel, river, or stream.
- 2 Nets must not be set in a way that causes fish to be stranded by the falling tide.
- 3 The use of stakes to secure nets is prohibited.
- 4 Each end of a net must have a surface buoy marked with the fisher's initials and surname.
- 5 Set nets must not exceed 60 metres in length.
- 6 Only one set net (maximum 60 metres) and one bait net (maximum 10 metres with a mesh size of 50 mm or less) can be carried on a boat at any one time.
- 7 Nets must not be set within 60 metres of another net.

An important point to note is that a set net may not be used as a drag net if it exceeds 40 metres in length.



THE NET

DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Use the net properly designed for the fish you are targeting.

There are correct net types to target each of the major fish species that can be taken by set net. For example, nets used in harbours and estuaries to target mullet, flatfish, or herrings are usually made of light materials and an appropriate mesh size for the species of fish. Mullet or flounder nets should not be used outside harbours, estuaries, or sheltered waters. Strongly constructed nets with larger mesh are intended for more open, exposed waters where fish are larger, and the use of nets with smaller mesh size may result in the capture of fish which must be returned to the sea. Minimum mesh sizes are regulated for each of the major set net target fisheries based on the size, biological characteristics, and shape of each fish species. Consult your regional regulations to find the correct mesh size for the species you wish to target, and when purchasing a net make sure you specify what species you will be fishing.

Below are some general features of a good net. If you are not familiar with set netting, please consult an experienced net maker before purchasing or constructing a net.

When targeting species that swim close to the bottom, such as flounder, unwanted bycatch can be minimised by bagging the net. To do this you should tie down the floatline of the net to the leadline to a height of approximately 30 cm at regular intervals along the net. Alternatively use low, loosely slung nets which are made of light materials.

ANCHORS

Use anchors that are designed for the conditions.

Concrete blocks, bricks, or sash weights will not hold even in a moderate current and should never be used in these conditions.

The anchor bridle should be weaker than all other ropes so that if it becomes fouled, the anchor can break free from the net. Some fishers find it helpful to use grapple anchors with tines that can straighten and release with a strong pull. Anchors should weigh about 1 kg for each 10 metres of net, so that a 60 metre net would have a 6 kg anchor at each end.

NET CONSTRUCTION

Use nets that can be easily retrieved.

A properly constructed net, if snagged, is easier to recover. It is important that the buoy rope is stronger than all the other ropes and is attached directly to the bottom lead line. This is to ensure that if the anchor or net is snagged, the buoy line can be used to recover the net.

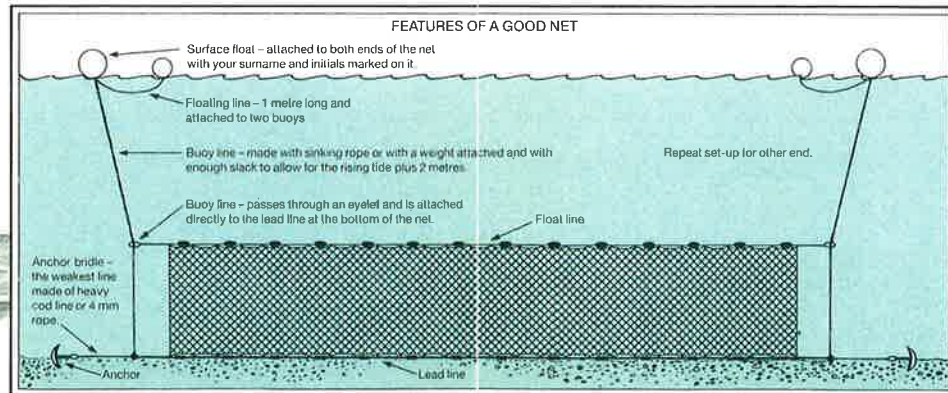
To avoid being caught or cut by a propeller, the buoy rope should be made of sinking line or weighted to hold it straight down. The buoy rope can be more easily recovered if about 1 metre of floating line and a small buoy are attached to the main buoy.

Buoy ropes should be of sufficient length to cope with variations in water depths due to tidal change or swell. Ensure that you have sufficient length of buoy line to recover your net if it is swept into nearby deeper water.

BUOYS

Use proper buoys.

Plastic bottles, oil cans, etc. are not suitable as they can be easily damaged by the sun and sink. Use only purpose designed floats that can be clearly seen at a distance. A buoy should be large enough to float on the surface even in a strong tide, but not so buoyant as to lift and move the net.



SETTING THE NET

Set your net where it can safely fish and be recovered.

If you are unfamiliar with the area, seek the advice of experienced local fishers. They will advise you of the local characteristics of the area and any potential problem areas for set netting. Stay near the net (preferably within sight) so that you can attend to it if conditions deteriorate.

Always check the weather and tides before you set your net.

Unexpected weather changes can make it unsafe or impossible to retrieve your net. Do not set your net if it is likely that a storm could occur which could cause the net to be lost.

If you do not remain in attendance make sure that you know and remember the exact location of your net.

Do not set your net in areas with fast currents, such as the entrance to harbours, where your net could be swept away. Where there is a moderate current set the net with, rather than against, the flow.

Do not set your net in areas where there are large amounts of weed, jellyfish, or logs floating in the water. These can clog the net and result in it being carried away by the tide.

Respect other people and wildlife.

Do not set your net in boating channels or attach it to navigation signs, beacons, or buoys. Avoid sites commonly used for wind surfing or bathing. Do not fish areas where marine mammals or seabirds concentrate, such as nesting or feeding areas for seabirds or seal colonies. If you inadvertently catch wildlife in your net, you should inform the staff at your local MAF Fisheries office or the Department of Conservation.

Set your net below the low tide line.

It is illegal to set a net where it can lie exposed and stranded at low tide and it is also bad practice. Any fish exposed to the air will quickly deteriorate or be eaten by scavengers. Do not set your net in the intertidal zone unless you remain in attendance of the net or use a short soak time.

Avoid setting on reefs.

In the northern areas of New Zealand the odds are high that you will lose or damage your net if you set it over “foul ground” or rocky reefs (areas with seaweed). Many of the reef species that may be taken in these areas are not preferred eating and may be wasted. In southern areas, experience is essential before set netting around rocky coastlines. In these places you should set your net between the kelp and (as nearly as possible) at right angles to the shore.

Be aware that certain reef fish, such as red moki, are slow growing and live in the same area throughout their life. A reef “stripped” of its resident fish can take a long time to recover.

FISHING THE NET

Use the shortest net and largest mesh that is practical.

The law defines the maximum length and the minimum mesh sizes you can use for each type of net. Larger meshes will allow a better escapement of small juvenile fish and non-target species. Short nets are easier to recover and, if properly set, can be effective in catching fish. They also help to ensure that you stay within your bag limit.

Stay near your net.

Responsible set net fishers remain near the net and check it at frequent intervals. If you are near your net you are better able to respond quickly to changing conditions. This is particularly important when deteriorating weather and sea conditions make it difficult to retrieve the net.

Short fishing times are better.

Even if you are not staying near your net, you should still check it at frequent intervals (hourly). Remove your net entirely after the shortest practicable soak time (3-4 hours). A short soak time reduces the possibility of damage or waste to the fish caught. There is also less chance of being caught out by the weather. Unwanted or undersized fish and any birds or marine mammals (which are rarely caught) have a better chance of remaining alive and unharmed if they are released carefully and soon after they are caught.

Avoid overnight set netting in certain areas.

Avoid set netting overnight, especially in areas where it is difficult to retrieve your net if conditions deteriorate. There is a much greater risk of the loss of nets and fish wastage during overnight setting because of the long fishing times involved. If you do fish in the dark, set the net for the shortest practical period.

RECOVERING YOUR NET

Take care when hauling your net in your boat.

When retrieving your net do not wear loose clothing with large buttons which will get caught up in the net. Ensure that your boat has no projections that could catch the net and cause a capsizing even in a slight swell. You should also haul (and set) your net over the windward side of the boat and bow first. These techniques will reduce the possibility of losing control of the net or entangling the propeller.

BUILD UP EXPERIENCE

Set your net with other experienced fishers.

Your set net practice will improve if you share your knowledge of fishing practices with others. Preferably fish with an experienced fisher at least a year before you fish your own net.

LOST NETS

Attempt to recover or report a lost net.

Lost nets usually roll up into a ball, but in some circumstances they can continue to fish for an extended period. Try to recover a lost net by grappling for it with an anchor. If you are unsuccessful, take bearings to remember the location or drop an anchor buoy to accurately mark the spot.

Inform your local MAF Fisheries office about the location of the lost net. Do not dive on the net yourself as this can be very dangerous.

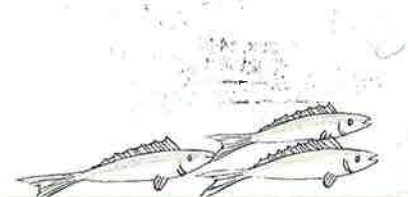
REGIONAL CONTROLS

Regulations relating to mesh size, net size and net construction vary from region to region.

There are also specific areas closed to set netting in each region.

Marine reserves, marine mammal sanctuaries and areas protected under the Conservation Act are also in place in many regions. Set netting is prohibited in these areas.

For further details of these controls, please contact MAF Fisheries at one of the following locations:



WHANGAREI

17 Keyte Street, Kensington
Private Bag
Phone 09-437 2822

NELSON

118 Vickerman Street, Port Nelson
Private Bag 14
Phone 03-548 1069

AUCKLAND

23 Hargreaves Street, College Hill, Ponsonby
PO Box 3437
Phone 09-379 4700

CHRISTCHURCH

Kyle Street, Riccarton
PO Box 8324, Riccarton
Phone 03-348 8939

TAURANGA

Cnr Elizabeth and Durham Streets
Private Bag
Phone 07-578 2069

DUNEDIN

1st Floor, 45 Filleul Street
Private Bag 1926
Phone 03-474 0333

NAPIER

Waghorne Street, Ahuriri
PO Box 2034
Phone 06-835 1065

INVERCARGILL

137 Spey Street
Private Bag 90101
Phone 03-214 4029

