

NSW TOTAL ALLOWABLE FISHING COMMITTEE

OCEAN HAULING FISHERY

- EASTERN SEA GARFISH

DETERMINATION FOR THE 2026/27 FISHING PERIOD

5 May 2026

Executive Summary

Preamble

The New South Wales (NSW) Total Allowable Fishing Committee (TAFC) has statutory responsibilities set out in Part 2A of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994* (the Act) to determine the Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) or Total Allowable Commercial Effort (TACE) by NSW fishers holding the relevant endorsement in some commercial fisheries. Various fishing regulations under the Act also contain provisions requiring the making of fishery determinations.

The TAFC is an independent statutory body established under Schedule 2 of the Act. In making a determination on catch or effort in a commercial fishery, the TAFC must consider the ecological, economic and social issues associated with each fishery and make determinations that 'on balance' pursue the objectives of the Act.

The TAFC is not subject to the control or direction of the Minister as to any determination made. However, the Minister may direct the TAFC on the procedures to be followed and the matters to be taken into account in making a fishing determination.

There is no formal harvest strategy for this fishery.

This determination is for Eastern Sea Garfish in the Ocean Hauling Fishery for the fishing period 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027.

Management recommendations & supporting actions

The TAFC provides the following recommendations to the Minister, NSW Fisheries and the fishing industry towards improving the management of the fishery:

1. It is recommended that DPIRD remove the weekend closure on the fishery for the commercial sector.
2. The TACC for ESG be reconsidered in 2027 with all updated fisheries data.

Determination

The Total Allowable Fishing Committee, pursuant to Part 2A of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*, determines that the total allowable commercial catch of Eastern Sea Garfish in the Ocean Hauling Fishery should be controlled and allocated through the following measure:

1. A TACC for Eastern Sea Garfish during the fishing period 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027 of **45.5 tonnes**.

Introduction

The Ocean Hauling (OH) Fishery targets approximately 20 finfish species using commercial hauling and purse seine nets from sea beaches and in ocean waters within three nautical miles of the NSW coast.

The OH Fishery is divided geographically into seven regions. Not all NSW ocean beaches and ocean waters are open to the OH Fishery, Schedules 1 - 3 of the *Fisheries Management (Ocean Hauling share Management Plan) Regulation 2006* (the Plan) list waters permanently closed, beaches closed on a seasonal basis and other restrictions on areas of operation of the OH Fishery.

Fishing gear used in the OH Fishery consists of a range of hauling nets and purse seine nets used to target finfish. The OH Fishery is categorised into a number of endorsement types that determine the areas and types of fishing gear that may be used. The OH Fishery is managed by a combination of both input and output controls including limited entry, TACC for major target species, boat capacity restrictions, net restrictions and temporal and spatial closures¹.

Transitional TACC determinations were used to assist the fishery to shift to quota management. For each new fishing period commencing 1 July 2024, the Plan requires the TAFC make a TACC determination for Eastern Sea Garfish in the OH Fishery.

The TAFC met with DPIRD Fisheries and shareholders in Sydney on 21 April 2026 to discuss fishery biology, catch and associated management issues concerning the Eastern Sea Garfish. DPIRD Fisheries presented a stock status report on the fishery.²

Biological considerations

Eastern Sea Garfish is a surface-dwelling species endemic to Australia, distributed from Moreton Bay to Eden. They are fast-growing, maturing at one year of age (~21 cm) and capable of living up to six years. They produce large, filamented eggs designed to attach to aquatic vegetation, and so are thought to be vulnerable to coastal environmental pressures.

The most recent stock assessment used an age-structured population model developed in 2021, but incorporating data through 2022/23 shows spawning stock biomass increasing approximately five-fold since the stock was overfished in the early 2000s. At that time, fishing mortality had remained consistently below natural mortality since 2008/09.

Recent 2024/25 age and length data are consistent with previous years. Recent landings are lower than the 1992/93 peak and standardized catch rates have

¹ Ocean Hauling Fishery – Management Report 2026. Department of Primary Industries and regional Development 19pp

² Eastern Sea Garfish Assessment Update for 2026 TAFC. Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development

demonstrated a substantial increase since then, however, without an updated stock assessment it is not possible to recommend any change to the current TACC of 45.4 t.

Recommendation

- The TACC for ESG be reconsidered in 2027 with all updated fisheries data.

Economic considerations

The Ocean Hauling (OH) Fishery targets approximately 20 finfish species using commercial hauling and purse seine nets from sea beaches and in ocean waters within three nautical miles of the NSW coast. Garfish hauling nets are used to target schools of ESG and can be used either from boats or the shore; however, the majority of fishers are boat-based (Stewart et al., 2005).

Using an opportunity cost of capital of 10 per cent, it has been estimated that the Net Economic Return³ of the OH fishery as a whole is negative and has been worsening since 2021/22 (Table 1). This is a concerning trend particularly as it is likely that currently high fuel costs will not improve the NER in the fishery for this financial year.

Table 1: *Estimated Net Economic Return of the EG Fishery in real 2024/25 dollars (BDO, 2025)*

EG Fishery	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Net Economic Return	-\$ 0.2 m	- \$1.2 m	-\$ 2.8m

There are 23 Fishing Businesses who held ESG quota in 2024/5, 11 of which neither fished or leased it out. During the current fishing period (2025/26), two fishing businesses have reported quota usage for ESG accounting for around 20% of the TACC.

The inflation-adjusted average annual price for ESG old at SFM has fluctuated over the last 10 years but overall shows a slowly increasing trend (Figure 1). Not all ESG caught in NSW is sold through SFM, but it is likely that the SFM price reflects general price trends for NSW product.

³ Net economic return is the long-run profit from a fishery after all costs have been met, including fuel, crew costs, repairs, the opportunity cost of family and owner labour, fishery management costs, depreciation and the opportunity cost of capital (excluding endorsement) (BDO, 2022). These unit costs or long-term costs all need to be covered if the fishing business is to remain viable in the fishery



Figure 1: Inflation adjusted annual average price of Eastern Sea Garfish sold at SFM (in 2024 prices)

ESG are susceptible to rapid quality degradation, requiring good cold chain management. Due to these requirements, industry submissions to the TAFC observed that weekend closures combined with road freight costs/limitations have impeded maximisation of economic return for this species.

The weekend closure was introduced in 2006 as part of the ESG recovery program. However, since then the stock is now assessed as sustainable and there has been a significant reduction in the number of operators participating in this fishery.

Fishery management considerations

In 2025, the Eastern Sea Garfish biological stock was classified as **Sustainable**. This was based on:

- Substantial (approximately five-fold) increases in spawning stock biomass since the stock was assessed as being overfished during the early 2000s.
- Fishing mortality had been below natural mortality since 2008/09.
- Increases in the proportion of fish aged 2+ and greater since the early 2000s.
- Selectivity in the fishery limits the catch of juveniles (mesh size increase 2006).
- Increases in catch rates (kg/day) since the late 1990s.

However, the lack of updated commercial fishing catch and effort remains a concern, and this concern is recognised by DPIRD and is being actively addressed. There are no reliable estimates of the recreational or Aboriginal harvest of ESG. Recreational fishers are known to catch ESG using small, baited hooks and by dip-netting, but the catch is believed to be negligible in comparison to commercial landings. Not all

garfish caught by recreational fishers in NSW are ESG with other garfish species also present in catches.

The fishery is subject to a weekend closure, the historical origin of which was related to reducing catch and effort when stock status was of concern and before the fishery became a share managed fishery. Currently, the management measure is a substantial impost on operators for limited benefit. Catch is now effectively managed with the TACC. Removing the weekend closure will provide operators with more temporal flexibility in fishing the TACC and better allow them to navigate logistical constraints regarding transport.

Recommendation

- It is recommended that DPIRD remove the weekend closure on the fishery for the commercial sector.

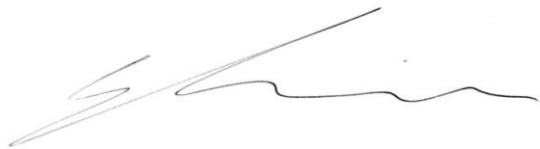
Determination

The Total Allowable Fishing Committee, pursuant to Part 2A of the *Fisheries Management Act 1994*, determines that the commercial catch of Eastern Sea Garfish in the Ocean Hauling Fishery should be controlled and allocated through the following measure:

1. A TACC for Eastern Sea Garfish during the period 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027 of **45.5 tonnes**.

Species	Catch Limit (tonnes)
Eastern Sea Garfish (<i>Hyporhamphus australis</i>)	45.5

Signed (for and on behalf of the TAFC)



William Zacharin
Chair, TAFC

5 May 2026

Rich Little - Scientific member

Sevaly Sen - Deputy Natural Resource Economic member

Daryl McPhee – Deputy Fisheries Manager member