

PROJECT: POTENTIAL OF OFFSHORE GILLNETTING IN THE GULF OF  
CARPENTARIA (83/20)

This project has proved a commercial success. Marketing is the one area where some problems still exist. Correct processing and packaging of the shark and mackerel fillets is essential market acceptance. The holding of shark trunks in RSW prior to filleting ensures a texture softening of the fillets. All fillets were shatter-packed into cartons before freezing.

The first stage of this project covered the offshore estuarine stocks of Barramundi and King Salmon. There is concern by Barramundi gillnetters that potential offshore gillnetting boats will pressure their fishery. All Barramundi and the majority of King Salmon from offshore grounds were mature fish. The vast majority were caught in State waters. Only two fishing days in commonwealth waters produced Barra. Four fishing days in commonwealth waters produced King Salmon. These particular fish came from sandbars within 10mls of the coastline.

FIGURE ONE (FILLET WEIGHT EXPRESSED IN TONNES)

	FISHING DAYS	BARRA	KING SALMON	MACKEREL	SHARK	OTHERS
STATE WATERS	60	2.60	7.02	-*	2.26	2.34
COMMONWEALTH WATERS	151	0.07	0.09	18.23	52.29	8.29

\* The small % of mackerel caught in State waters was included with other species

The second stage of this project covers the fish in Commonwealth waters. The main area fished was from Karumba to Weipa and 30mls out to sea.

The gillnet used here was 1500 meters of line 35 monofilaments x 7" mesh x 50 meshes drip. The webbing was slung onto 12mm green polypropylene rope. Moulded leads were used on the lead line. No floats were spliced onto the cork line. Clip-on 12" polystyrene floats were used every 30-50 yds. 7" mesh appears to be the dual purpose mesh size, catching well on shark mackerel and reef fish.

The net was set as a drift net with the vessel attached to the net with a 100 meters bridle. A 10kg iron weight and a 12" float was placed at the join of bridle to net to prevent the net rolling. The vessel was downwind of the net, keeping slight tension on the net lines.

The last 50 metres of the net furthest from the vessel tended to roll with larger sharks. Mesh gathering occurs here as does also happen throughout the net during calm nights with little strain.

The depth to set the cork line below the surface depends on the target species and wave height. A net too close to the surface will roll up in a rough sea. Air bladder fish also cause this problem in all but calm seas. Shark and mackerel with no air bladders will sink a net, and if insufficient bouyancy is used, cause the net to roll up as it drifts over the sea-bed.

Because of the deeper meshes (50) belly overwrap can occur in shooting of the net from a small diameter spool. This was overcome by cutting a Belly-vee into the webbing of the last of the net off the spool. This was also done where large sharks had torn the webbing throughout the net.

A deeper drop net is harder to adjust the rate of haulage relation between cork and lead lines. This problem only manifests in shooting away of the nets (cork line slacker than lead lines) resulting in the polystyrene bubbles going under the leadline. Experience helps avoid the problem.

For this survey 1500 metres of 50 mesh drop had a commercial production life of 10 weeks. The clearer water produced more of the saleable sharks. The dirty water areas caught more larger shark resulting in more damage to the net.