

The Effects of haul seining in Victorian Bays and Inlets

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A 3-year study by the Marine and Freshwater Resources Institute (MAFRI) into the effects of haul seining in Victoria's Bays and Inlets has just been completed. Results of experiments conducted during the study allowed an overall mortality rate of fish encountering a haul seine to be calculated. When results were averaged across all fish species they showed that for every 9 retained fish, 22 fish passed through the net and 19 were discarded of which only 2 were dead. For King George whiting the ratio was even more promising; for every 21 retained fish, 66 passed through the net and 13 were discarded of which only 2 were dead.

One of the biggest concerns addressed by the project was the meshing of undersized King George whiting. The **MAFRI** research team worked closely with commercial fishers to trial alternative netting materials in the wings of the haul seine nets. It was found that by replacing nylon mesh panels with polyethylene material, the meshing of undersized King George whiting could be reduced by a factor of up to 25. The fish either pass through or may simply just "bounce" off the polyethylene mesh, since it is stiffer than nylon and tends to hold its shape in the water.

This project has important results for Victoria's bay and inlet haul seine fisheries. It has challenged the perceptions of some people that this fishery causes significant unnecessary death of non-target and juvenile fish. The results suggest that when used correctly, haul seines are very efficient and kill very few discarded fish. This study was funded jointly by the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation and by Fisheries Victoria
