

# Information for recreational vessels fishing near commercial trawler vessels

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QUICK GUIDE

MAY 2025



**Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa**  
New Zealand Government

*Nō te rere moana Aotearoa*  
**MARITIME**  
NEW ZEALAND

# Introduction

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It is important to know the key risks and hazards when fishing near commercial fishing trawlers and how to keep yourself, your passengers and vessels safe.

This guidance is for recreational tuna fishers on the West Coast of New Zealand, in areas where larger commercial vessels, specifically trawlers, may be fishing for Hoki or other species. It is also useful for recreational fishers hunting other species in areas where commercial fishing trawlers are operating.

Maritime New Zealand is grateful for the support and expertise we have received from the commercial fishing and recreational craft sectors in the development of this quick guide.

We all want everyone to get home safe to enjoy their catch with family and friends.

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# Commercial Trawling

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Commercial trawling is when fishing nets are cast out and pulled through the water behind a vessel. You may also see smaller, inshore fishing vessels when you are out on the water.

Commercial trawlers can range from 40m to over 100m in length. They operate at all times of the day and night with different types of nets and gear on board, doing a range of activities and manoeuvres - all of which can create risk if other vessels get too close.



*Figure one:* Comparison of a recreational boat (average length is around 6m-9m in length) and a commercial trawler (example shown is 64m in length).

## Entanglement

Commercial trawlers use different types of nets. Trawl nets are released, set and hauled back in from the trawler's stern (the back end). This is the area where other vessels need to take extreme care.

Trawl nets are made of rope but are towed by very heavy steel cables (called warps), which work under extreme tension when the vessel is trawling (up to 30 tonne). When they are being pulled in, the nets surface behind the vessel as far away as 200m to 300m (that's more than two rugby fields' end-to-end).

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They also use other gear that can create a risk of entanglement or collision. This gear can include; large trawl doors that surface behind the trawler, and booms holding lines to scare off seabirds.

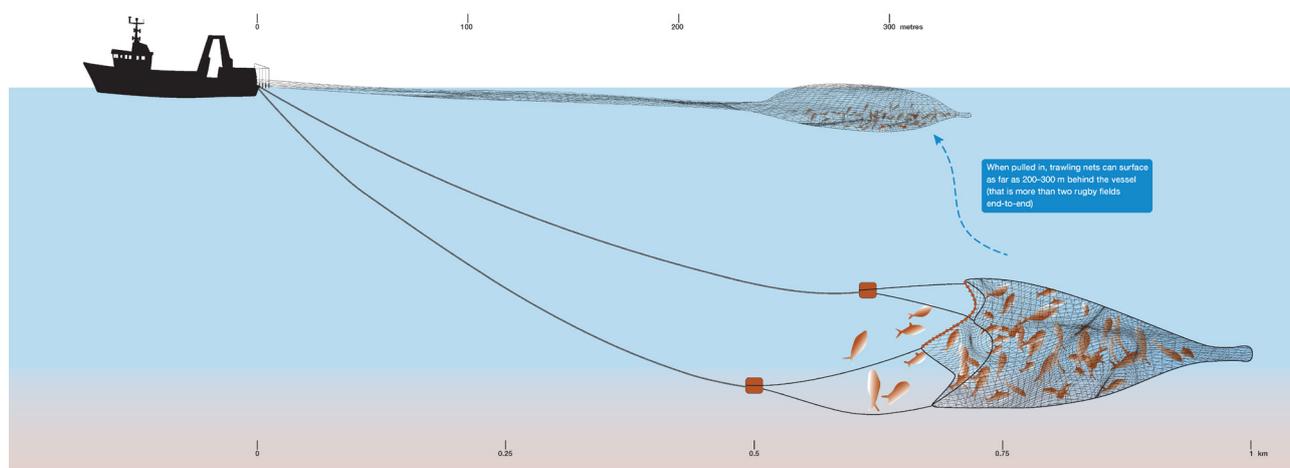


Figure two: Side view of commercial net cast behind the vessel.

## Collision prevention

To prevent a collision:

- Keep a look-out at all times.
- Follow the 'give way rules' of the water.
- Use navigation lights.

## Keeping a look-out

You need to keep a look-out at all times and an eye on what commercial fishing trawlers are doing. Keeping a look-out (by sight and hearing) at all times on your vessel is crucial to prevent collisions, as conditions and circumstances can change quickly. Poor or no look-out is a significant cause of maritime incidents and can result in the loss of life, injuries, or damage to the environment and property. It is important you keep a proper look-out during your trip, particularly at night.

### More information

For more information, see Maritime New Zealand's webpage: [Look-out and watchkeeping](#).

## Following the 'give way rules' of the water

Maritime collision prevention regulations apply to all vessels (recreational and commercial) on New Zealand waters regardless of their size. It is important you understand what these regulations mean and follow them at all times.

A key rule to remember is that recreational vessels must stay well clear of commercial vessels that are fishing, especially as commercial fishing trawlers cannot stop, turn or avoid collision quickly when trawling. Like trucks, these vessels also have blind spots if smaller vessels get too close. Staying well clear of commercial vessels makes sure you are keeping your crew and the crew of commercial vessels, safe.

If you need to, talk to the skipper on a commercial fishing trawler to understand what they are doing. Contact the commercial vessel using VHF channel 16 and then agree which working channel to switch to (for example, channel 10).

### More information

For more information, see Maritime New Zealand's webpage: [Rules of the water](#).

## Use of navigation lights and night fishing

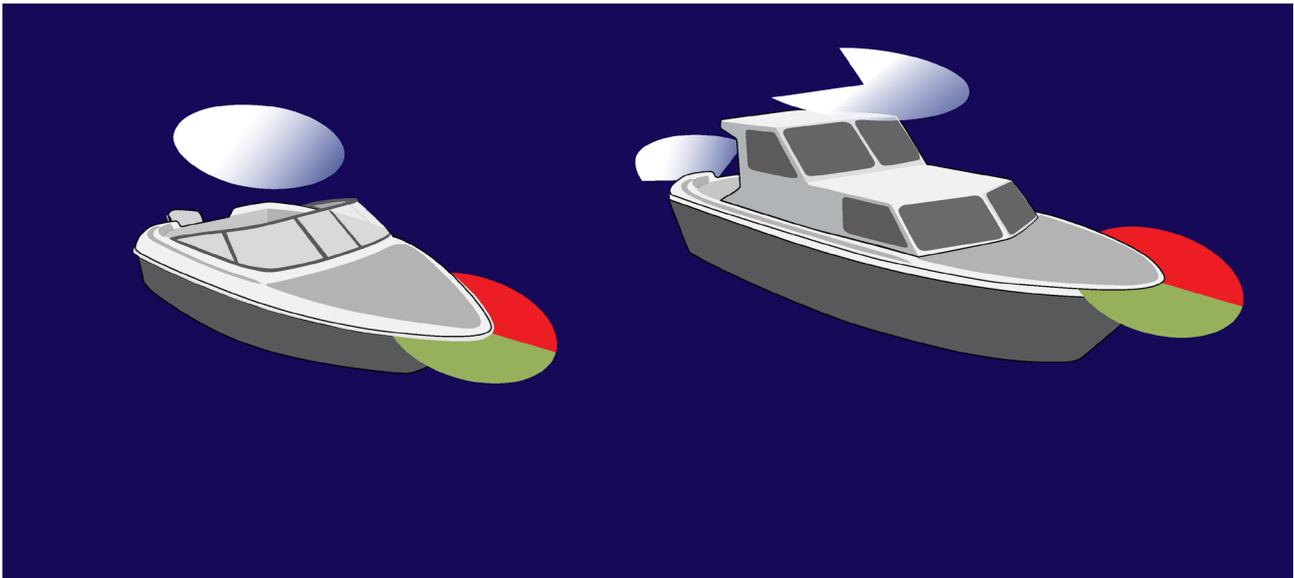
Commercial fishing trawlers can also work at night, so maritime collision prevention regulations still apply. Remember, recreational vessels must stay well clear of commercial vessels that are fishing.

During hours of darkness, you must display lights on your vessel and understand what other lights mean. Not having lights displayed at night can result in other vessels colliding with you. Not understanding what other lights mean can also result in a collision, with another vessel or object. Misinterpreting lights can also result in taking the wrong evasive action, which can lead to serious accidents, damage to vessels and loss of life.

From sunset to sunrise and at times of poor visibility, all craft must display the correct navigational safety lights.

For power driven craft under 12m in length that can travel faster than 7 knots this means:

- a green starboard light
  - a red port light
  - a white stern light
  - a masthead light (that may be combined into an all-round white light).
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*Figure three:* Navigational safety lights for power driven craft under 12m in length.

### **More information**

For more information, see Safer Boating NZ's YouTube video: [Navigation Lights - Boat Safety in NZ - Maritime New Zealand](#).

# Bar crossing

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Crossing a bar is one of the most dangerous parts of a fishing trip. There are some key things to remember:

## If in doubt, do not go out

Make sure you have the right skills to cross the bar and are confident that the conditions are suitable to cross safely. Before you head out, build your knowledge of the bar you are crossing; study the weather, tides and the state of the bar. Tell someone when you are going out and when you expect to be back. Also, log a bar crossing trip report with either Maritime Radio or Coastguard. Having the right skills and knowledge will help you to safely assess the conditions before you launch. If at any stage you doubt the safety of the passage, do not go out. No catch is worth your life, or the lives of your mates.

## Commercial vessels can cross bars in a wider range of conditions

Commercial fishing trawlers are often far larger vessels compared to recreational vessels. They have more power, with highly trained specialised crew and skippers. They can cross bars and operate in a wider range of conditions.

In some cases, recreational skippers may be influenced by witnessing a larger commercial fishing trawlers cross a bar and decide to follow, even when the conditions are not suitable for smaller vessels. Do not make the decision to cross the bar based on commercial activity – remember, **if in doubt, do not go out**.

### More information

For more information, see:

Maritime New Zealand's webpage: [Crossing the bar](#).

Coastguard's webpage: [Bar awareness](#).

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# VHF Radio

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VHF radio is a safety communications network at sea. VHF channel 16 (156.8 MHz) is the international distress and calling channel for marine VHF radio. It is used for emergency (Mayday), urgency (Pan Pan), and safety (Securite) calls, as well as hailing other vessels before switching to a different working channel. It should be prioritised for emergencies or key communications.

You can listen to channel 16 to understand what a commercial fishing trawler is doing, but do not use it for general “chit chat”. Clogging and overusing channel 16 risks interrupting important information being shared by commercial fishing trawlers, including an emergency on-board.

It is important to understand and be familiar with how to use your VHF **before** going out on your vessel. There are various factors to consider with VHF radio use:

## Know your VHF radio’s limits

VHF radio works from vessel to vessel and vessel to shore, when in range of another vessel or repeater station. Coverage can depend on the power of your VHF radio, whether it is fixed or handheld and the height of the aerial. Make sure you understand the coverage you have and the channels available, and monitor channel 16 at all times.

## Know procedures and protocols

The VHF radio network relies on agreed procedures and protocols to keep people safe. You need to have completed a *VHF Radio Operator* course to use a VHF radio in anything other than an emergency.

## Use of secondary channels - monitored vs. unmonitored channels

Channel 16 is always the best distress and calling station and once you have made initial contact with a vessel, move to a secondary channel for further communications. Channel 6 is the best secondary channel within the 25 nautical mile limit, and channel 10 for vessels beyond it.

### More information

For more information, see:

Maritime New Zealand’s webpage: [VHF marine radios save lives.](#)

Maritime New Zealand’s webpage: [Are you VHF ready?](#)

Maritime New Zealand’s webpage: [Marine radio VHF coverage.](#)

Coastguard’s VHF Radio Operator course: [Maritime VHF operator’s certificate.](#)

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## General safety information

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Before you head out on the water, make sure you cover the basics of safety:

### Wear your life jacket

Make sure that you and all of your crew, are wearing appropriately fitting life jackets. When choosing a lifejacket, consider:

- the type of recreational activities you do on water
- the distance you plan to travel away from shore
- the weather and sea conditions you will encounter
- the local bylaws that may apply to your region.

#### More information

For more information, see:

Maritime New Zealand's webpage: [Lifejackets](#).

### Take two waterproof ways to call for help

A variety of communications equipment can be used on the water - make sure you carry at least two that will work when wet.

Different types of communications equipment work in different areas, so make sure the equipment you have will work where you are boating.

#### More information

For more information, see:

Maritime New Zealand's webpage: [Communications](#).

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## Check the marine weather forecast

Weather conditions can make the difference between an enjoyable day out and an uncomfortable or even tragic trip.

Before you go out, always check the marine weather forecast, seek knowledge about the area you are heading out on and keep an eye out for changing conditions.

### More information

For more information, see:

Maritime New Zealand's webpage: [Weather](#).

MetService New Zealand's webpage: [Marine weather forecast](#).

## Tell someone where you are going and when you will be back

With little or no dedicated rescue services currently available on the West Coast, those around you might be the first to offer assistance should you need. Make sure you log a trip report with Maritime Radio or Coastguard and make sure someone knows where you are should you need help.

### More information

For more information, see:

Maritime New Zealand's webpage: [Before you head out](#).

## Avoid alcohol

Alcohol can impair a person's:

- ability and time to react
- ability to perform simple tasks
- judgement
- sense of direction and situational awareness.

These factors put yourself and others at risk. They also increase the likelihood of you ending up in the water by accident.

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A responsible skipper will never operate under the influence of alcohol or allow an intoxicated person to operate their boat.

### **More information**

For more information, see:

Maritime New Zealand's webpage: [Alcohol](#).

## Disclaimer

This publication provides general guidance on your duties under relevant legislation (including the Maritime Transport Act 1994, Maritime Rules, Marine Protection Rules and the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015).

It is not possible for Maritime New Zealand to address every situation that could occur at work, and you must make sure you are:

- operating according to the latest Maritime Rules, Marine Protection Rules, and other legislation; and
- obtaining legal advice where appropriate.

You need to think about this guidance and how best to apply it to your particular circumstances.

Maritime New Zealand regularly reviews and revises guidance to make sure that it is up-to-date and reflects any changes in legislation. However, this guidance might not be current, so to confirm that you are referring to the latest version of this publication check [maritimenz.govt.nz](https://maritimenz.govt.nz).



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