

Managing displaced commercial effort in the Barramundi Fishery

Why is commercial fishing effort being displaced?

Access to intertidal waters overlying Aboriginal land in two key commercial barramundi fishing areas have been closed by Traditional Owners. The Mini Mini/Murgenella system, and Buckingham Bay and Arnhem Bay are important areas for commercial barramundi fishing, with a section 19 permit under the Commonwealth *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act*, administered by the Northern Land Council, required for commercial activities to occur in these areas.

What is the concern associated with displaced effort?

The recent changes in commercial access have the potential to displace commercial fishing effort into areas shared with recreational and tourism fishers. This shift may increase commercial effort in these areas above recent historical levels, leading to increased direct interactions between recreational fishers and commercial operators and potentially impacting on recreational catches and experiences.

At the same time, commercial fishers have expressed concerns about the loss of access to key commercial fishing areas and its potential impact on their business viability. This loss may also affect their capacity to supply locally caught barramundi and threadfin salmon to consumers and restaurants.

What is being done to manage the potential relocation of effort?

The Northern Territory Government has implemented an interim commercial fishing effort limits in the Roper River, Anson Bay and the Moyle River catchments for the 2024 fishing season. These are the areas that experience the highest level of overlap between recreational and commercial fishers.

The interim commercial effort limits have been designed to maintain commercial fishing activity in the Roper River, Anson Bay and the Moyle River catchments within their historical range over the past decade.

The commercial effort limit is set at the maximum annual commercial fishing effort that each of these areas received from 2013-2023. This timeframe represents the current rationalisation of the commercial Barramundi Fishery in terms of licence numbers and available net units.

The maximum commercial effort (rather than the average) was deemed appropriate as it maintains the commercial viability in each catchment, and prevents an increase in effort above recent historical levels that could impact other sectors (Figure 1).

Why commercial effort limits and not commercial catch limits?

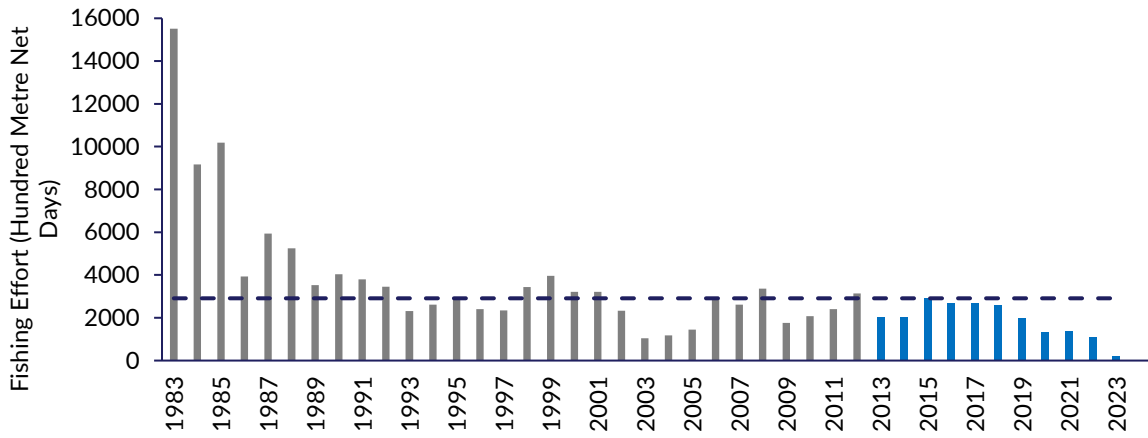
A commercial fishing effort limit (rather than a catch limit) was deemed the most appropriate management option for the below listed reasons:

- Effort limits have a direct relevance to managing the issue of displaced commercial effort and align with the existing effort-based management of the Barramundi Fishery.
- Catch limits provide less responsiveness to short-term fluctuations in catchability and longer-term fluctuations in biomass, both of which are both strongly influenced by wet season strength.
A nominal catch limit which may represent a small fraction of the population during productive periods (e.g. following successive strong wet seasons) may be undesirably high if environmental conditions deteriorate and less fish are available (and vice versa).
- The Commercial Barramundi Fishery Harvest Strategy already contains mechanisms to restrict commercial catch in the event that catch rates decline below pre-determined thresholds. Further information on the harvest strategy can be found online [here](#)

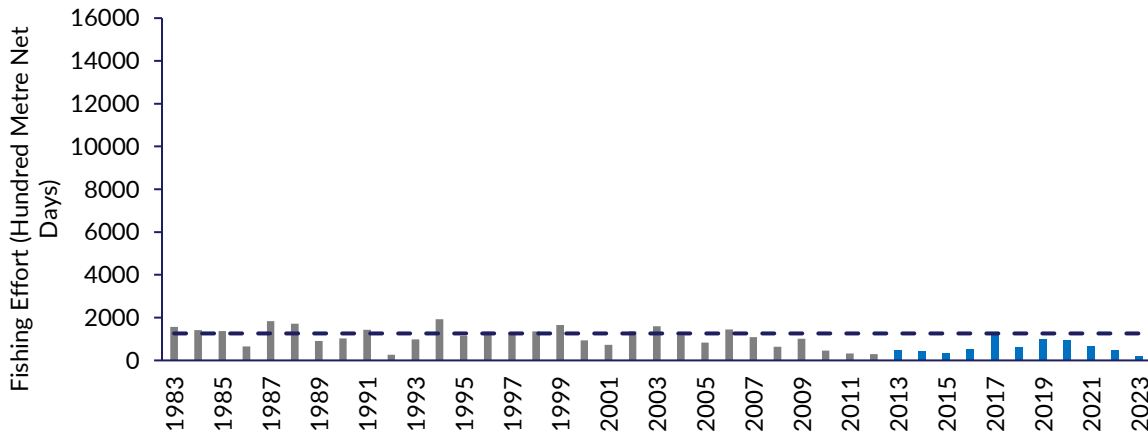
How long will the interim commercial effort limits be in place for?

The interim commercial effort limits are temporary and will be in place for the 2024 fishing season while a longer-term solution is developed in consultation with key stakeholders.

Anson Bay



Moyle River



Roper River

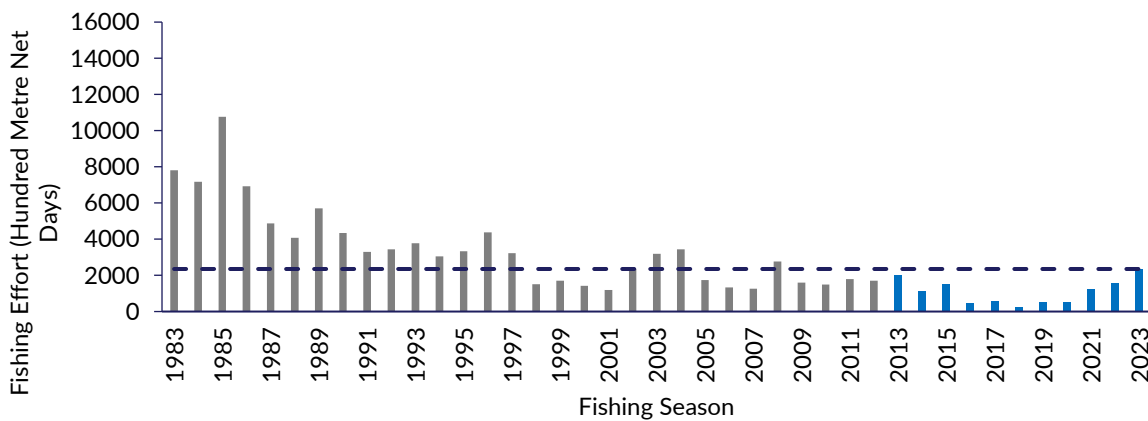


Figure 1. Commercial fishing effort (Hundred Metre Net Days) in Anson Bay, Moyle River and Roper River areas from 1983-2023. The period from 2013-2023 represents the current rationalisation of the fleet and is illustrated by blue bars. Dashed black line represents maximum annual effort from 2013-2023.