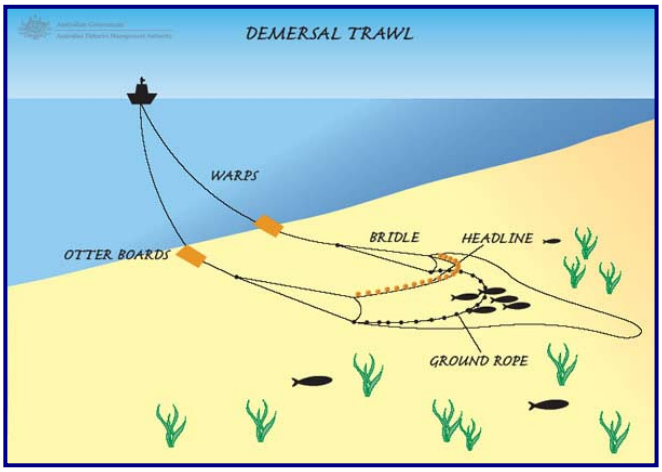
Trawling

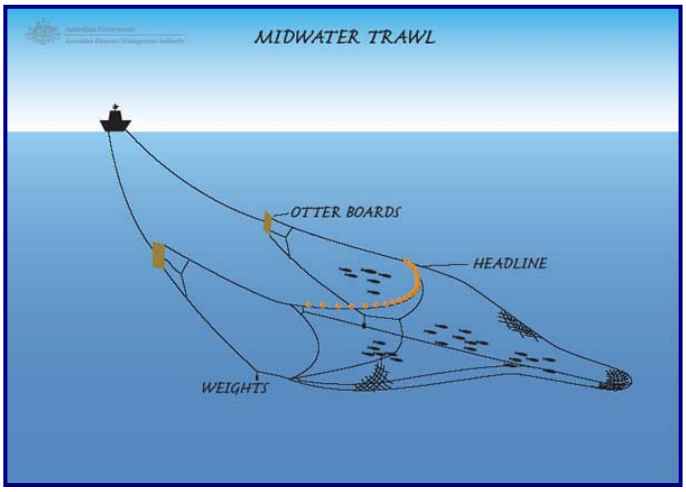
Fishing Methods Fact Card

What is trawling?



Trawlers drag large nets through the water, either on the bottom (bottom trawlers or draggers) or in the middle of the water (mid-water trawlers). In both cases, the nets are long flattened socks, with the front end held open by "doors" that are pushed off to the side by the water as the ship moves forward. The nets catch whatever gets in front of them. These are somewhat like dredges, but do not have the solid frame at the front of the net, and tend to "fly" slightly above the bottom. The size of the mesh and the area of fishing determines what is caught.

Trawl nets and boats are generally quite large. However, a smaller version was invented to enable salmon trollers to also trawl, once salmon became less abundant. These are "beam trawlers" – a relatively small trawl net that is held open by a long pole. These are used to catch shrimp.



What do trawlers catch?

Bottom trawlers are used to catch shrimp and prawns as well as a variety of fish that live on the bottom (like skate, flounder, sole, cod). Mid-water trawlers are used to catch "pelagic" fish – species that live up in the water – that are usually of relatively low value but live in large schools. Examples are hake and pollock from the Canadian west coast, anchovies in Peru, and herring in the North Sea.

What are the issues?

The biggest issue with both kinds of trawling is the "by-catch" – unwanted species. This is being controlled to some extent by modifying where and how people fish and by special by-catch escape panels. For example, grids that move larger fish and turtles to an escape hatch at the top of the net, while shrimp remain in the bottom and get caught.

Bottom trawling has an extra problem of destroying any other hard structures that grow on the bottom – such as corals and sponges – and in many cases messing about with the ecosystem at the bottom of the ocean. In some cases, this increases productivity of an area, in others it destroys sensitive ecosystems.