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Australian Government Announces Support Package for Sustainable Abalone Fishery

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The reform comes amid declining availability of abalone for commercial fishing



The New South Wales (NSW) Government in Australia has announced financial and practical support for commercial abalone fishers as the state moves to a new operating model aimed at improving the long-term sustainability of its abalone fishery on the South Coast.

Under the Minns Labor Government's plan, commercial abalone shareholders will be offered a voluntary share surrender programme, alongside financial guidance, training and mental health support to help fishers manage the transition and plan for future business and employment opportunities.

The reform comes amid declining availability of abalone for commercial fishing. The independent Total Allowable Fishing Committee has set the Total Allowable Catch (TAC) for Blacklip Abalone at 52 tonnes for the period from 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027, representing a 40 per cent reduction compared with the 2025/26 catch.

The Government said the package has been developed in consultation with commercial fishers, the local Aboriginal community, fisheries scientists and natural resource management experts.

As part of the new management framework, the fishery will transition to a zoning approach. The Central Zone, extending from near Bundeena to Red Point, south of Eden, will be closed to commercial abalone fishing from 1 July 2027. Commercial fishing will continue in the Northern and Southern zones, north of Bundeena and south of Red Point, respectively.

The Government has increased funding for the voluntary share surrender programme, providing commercial fishers with greater certainty around the transition and its timeline. The sector will have six weeks to consider the final package and submit applications.

The transition package includes targeted assistance to help eligible abalone fishing businesses adapt to the new operating environment.

Eligible fishing business owners can receive up to A$1,000 for financial guidance from an appropriately accredited adviser. The grant will be available to all NSW abalone shareholders, irrespective of whether they participate in the voluntary share surrender programme.

Those who surrender all their abalone shares through the programme will also be eligible for up to A$9,000 in training support. The funding can be used for training delivered by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO), covering areas such as transition planning, business management, skills development, future employment opportunities and other career pathways.

The Government will also provide mental health support to assist fishers and businesses during the transition.

The measures are intended to balance the need to protect NSW’s abalone resource for future generations with the need to maintain a viable commercial fishing sector in areas where fishing activity can continue.

The reform highlights the growing importance of science-based catch limits, spatial management and transition support in managing fisheries facing resource pressures while supporting the livelihoods of fishing communities.