(ii) The first body section (belly) of the net has 35 or more meshes that are at least 8 inches (20.3 cm).

(ii) The mesh decreases in size throughout the body of the net to 2 inches (5 cm) or smaller towards the terminus of the net.

(c) Net modifications. No vessel subject to this part shall use any device, gear, or material, including, but not limited to, nets, net strengtheners, ropes, lines, or chafing gear, on the top of the regulated portion of a trawl net; except that, one splitting strap and one bull rope (if present) consisting of line or rope no more than 3 inches (7.2 cm) in diameter may be used if such splitting strap and/or bull rope does not constrict, in any manner, the top of the regulated portion of the net, and one rope no greater than 0.75 inches (1.9 cm) in diameter extending the length of the net from the belly to the terminus of the codend along the top, bottom, and each side of the net. “Top of the regulated portion of the net” means the 50 percent of the entire regulated portion of the net that (in a hypothetical situation) will not be in contact with the ocean bottom during a tow if the regulated portion of the net were laid flat on the ocean floor. For the purpose of this paragraph (c), head ropes shall not be considered part of the top of the regulated portion of a trawl net. A vessel shall not use any means or mesh configuration on the top of the regulated portion of the net, as defined paragraph (c) of this section, if it obstructs the meshes of the net or otherwise causes the size of the meshes of the net while in use to diminish to a size smaller than the minimum specified in paragraph (a) of this section.

(d) Mesh obstruction or constriction. (1) A fishing vessel may not use any mesh configuration, mesh construction, or other means on or in the top of the net, as defined in paragraph (c) of this section, that obstructs the meshes of the net in any manner.

(e) Stowage of nets. Otter trawl vessels retaining 100 lb (45.3 kg) or more of summer flounder from May 1 through October 31, or 200 lb (90.6 kg) or more of summer flounder from November 1 through April 30, and subject to the minimum mesh size requirement of paragraph (a)(1) of this section may not have “available for immediate use” any net or any piece of net that does not meet the minimum mesh size requirement, or any net, or any piece of net, with mesh that is rigged in a manner that is inconsistent with the minimum mesh size requirement. A net that is stowed in conformance with one of the methods specified in §648.23(b) and that can be shown not to have been in recent use is considered to be not “available for immediate use.”

(f) The minimum net mesh requirement may apply to any portion of the net. The minimum mesh size and the portion of the net regulated by the minimum mesh size may be adjusted pursuant to the procedures in §648.102.