



WA Statewide recreational fishing rule changes – frequently asked questions

From 1 February 2013, we are introducing new simpler rules for recreational fishing in Western Australia. The changes are to improve your recreational fishing experience and to provide a more effective management of finfish.

What are the main rule changes?

- **Bag limits** – The way we group finfish species and their bag limits has gone from 13 categories covering different regions of the State down to just four. These four categories – demersal, pelagic, nearshore/estuarine and freshwater are based on where the fish live and their biology. Importantly, they now apply on a Statewide basis.
- **Transporting recreationally caught fish by courier** – Recreationally caught fish can no longer be transported unaccompanied using commercial couriers.
- **Transporting and landing recreationally caught fish** – There are new simpler rules for filleting fish at sea and landing fish. Now a minimum fillet length applies only to fish with a minimum size limit. Fish with a maximum size limit need to be landed whole.

Why have the rules been changed?

We recognised that some of the previous rules, particularly those around bag limits for finfish, had become complex and difficult to understand. Following extensive consultation with the recreational fishing community through Recfishwest, the State's peak recreational fishing body, new rules were developed. The focus is on making the new rules as consistent and easy to understand as possible while helping us to meet future sustainability challenges.

Why have the finfish categories changed?

Before the new rules, we had three separate finfish bag limit categories for three different bioregions (the North Coast Bioregion, the Gascoyne Coast Bioregion and the South Coast Bioregion) and four bag limit categories in the West Coast Bioregion. That gave a total of 13 finfish bag limit categories with significant variations between each region, making the rules complex and difficult to understand. The old 'high risk' fish categories included pelagic fish, demersal fish and even some nearshore/estuarine fish. Building on the lessons learnt from managing demersal species in the West Coast Bioregion, a new resource-based approach to management has been adopted.

Under the new approach, we have reduced the bag limits to just four 'resource-based' categories, grouping fish together by their biology and where they live. These groups are:

- Demersal finfish – generally living on or near the ocean floor at depths of more than 20 metres.
- Pelagic finfish – normally inhabiting the surface or the middle depths of the ocean.
- Nearshore and estuarine finfish – typically living in the estuary reaches of rivers and/or in the ocean in depths of water up to 20 metres.
- Freshwater finfish – found in the mid to upper non-saline reaches of rivers, freshwater lakes and dams.

Most importantly, these categories now apply on a Statewide basis.

Why are there still separate bag limits for demersal finfish in the West Coast Bioregion?

Lower bag limits for demersal species in the West Coast Bioregion are part of several management measures to reduce the recreational catch in this area by at least 50 per cent (based on 2005/06 levels). We needed to make these reductions – with the cooperation of the commercial and recreational sectors – after independently reviewed research showed demersal species like dhufish, pink snapper and baldchin groper were being overfished in this area. We will be reviewing these measures during 2013.

How have the ‘landing fish’ rules changed?

The previous rules relating to landing fish and filleting fish at sea were complex and difficult to understand. These rules meant you could fillet some fish at sea but not other ‘special-risk’ fish. There was also confusion around trips, which included staying overnight on islands.

The rules around landing fish have been significantly simplified. Now you can carry fish with a minimum size limit at sea in the following forms:

- filleted, skin and scale on (minimum fillet length of 30 cm); or
- trunked (with head and tail removed), skin on; or
- whole (can be gutted and gilled).

If you are staying on an island overnight and transporting and landing fish the following day, the minimum 30 cm fillet length with skin and scale on applies.

Fish with a maximum size limit, except shark, must be carried at sea and landed whole.

Fish without a size limit can be carried at sea and landed:

- filleted, skin on; or
- trunked, skin on; or
- whole (can be gutted and gilled).

It was originally proposed to limit the amount of demersal finfish fillets people could have in their possession to 10kg – why hasn’t that happened?

We recognised that levels of fishing pressure and stock abundance vary around the State. This was reflected in the feedback from the consultation process, with many people suggesting there is less fishing pressure on fish stocks in the South Coast Bioregion than in the north of the State.

A decision on reducing possession limits will be deferred until we have been able to consider the stock status of demersal species in the South Coast and Gascoyne Coast bioregions, along with the results of the Statewide recreational boat fishing survey. We are expecting to have more information available in 2013.

Why can’t I use a courier to freight fish I have caught even if I am still within the possession limit?

Some fishers, while on extended fishing trips to the north of the State, were using commercial couriers to freight their catch back to Perth. Some did this to transport several consignments of fish over a number of days, well in excess of a single possession limit. For example, one courier company reported transporting more than 160 consignments of recreationally caught fish (more than three tonnes of fillets) over a 12-week period from one regional town. Clearly, such quantities of fish being transported on a regular basis will ultimately take their toll on local fish stocks and the quality of the recreational fishing.

The decision to stop unaccompanied recreationally caught fish being transported by commercial

couriers is to protect the future of your recreational fishing in regional WA. In many coastal towns recreational fishing is a highly valued activity and a key drawcard for tourism.

You now have to accompany your recreationally caught fish anywhere within the State regardless of whether you travel by air, land or water. So if you've been on a fishing charter 'up north' you can still bring some of your catch back with you, but only up to 20 kg. You can still drive 'in convoy' with fish stored in a single freezer or ice-box (providing everyone's fish is clearly labelled with the owner's name and they are on hand to identify their fish).

If the rules are simpler, why are there still a number of specific regional rules?

Where possible, we've tried to remove regional variations. For example, bag limit and possession limits for barramundi are now consistent across the North Coast Bioregion, rather than having a possession limit of one barramundi on the Ord River, and a bag limit of one in the Broome area.

However, there will still be some regional variations; for example there will still be a closed season for pink snapper in Cockburn Sound because we need to protect those fish when spawning. Regional or species variations have been kept to ensure we can protect fish stocks if they are potentially vulnerable to overfishing.

How do individual species limits work with groups of fish such as cods, emperors and sea perch?

For a group of species, such as emperor, an individual bag limit (shown in the bag and size limits in the Statewide rules guide) applies to each of the individual species in that group.

For example, emperors (except blue-lined emperor) have an individual daily bag limit of three in all bioregions (except the West Coast). They are also within a mixed species daily bag limit of five (across all demersal finfish for these bioregions).

5 fish = 3 red-throat emperor

(species has an individual species bag limit of **3**) and **2** spangled emperor.

OR

5 fish = 3 spangled emperor

(species has an individual species bag limit of **3**) and **2** red-throat emperor.

How was the recreational fishing community consulted on these changes?

Peak recreational fishing body Recfishwest consulted with the community. In addition to receiving written submissions and responses to an online questionnaire, Recfishwest held focus groups in key regional centres around the State to gauge the views of the recreational fishing community. They received more than 900 submissions from recreational fishers. Based on this feedback, modifications were made to the proposals to ensure the highest level of public support. Recfishwest has given these new rules their full support.

When will the rules be reviewed?

There is a seven-week period from the Minister's announcement of the new rules to the 1 February 'go live' date. We did this to allow fishers to familiarise themselves with the changes before they come into effect. In the future, to ensure you aren't 'caught out' by the rules constantly changing, new rules will be introduced on 1 January each year (unless there is an urgent sustainability issue that needs to be addressed). A new recreational fishing guide will be launched towards the end of the year, so that everyone is clear about the rules for the following year. This is an important part of making the rules simpler.

Where can I find out more information about the rules?

Local Department of Fisheries offices can provide advice and copies of the new *Statewide Recreational Fishing Guide 2013*. Alternatively, you can find more about the rules and other recreational fishing issues from the Department's website – which also has contact details for local Fisheries offices. If you'd like to receive regular updates about recreational fishing rules, research and management, you can sign up to our new recreational fishing newsletter *Catch!*

W: www.fish.wa.gov.au/recfishing