The results of WA’s biggest ever recreational boat fishing survey are in!

The innovative survey design, used for the first time, integrated data from multiple sources to cost-effectively generate results that cover the whole State.

The survey complements many other fish stock assessments we carry out, providing us with an even clearer picture of the health of our fisheries and aquatic ecosystems. This information is critical to help us to manage our aquatic resources more effectively and to ensure recreational fishing in WA remains some of the best in the world.

Nearly 9,000 recreational boat fishers from across the State participated in the survey between March 2011 and February 2012. Nearly 3,000 kept fishing log books as part of an extensive series of phone surveys, while others were interviewed at boat ramps. Cameras also monitored boat ramp ‘traffic’ 24 hours a day, to gauge launches and retrievals at key boat ramps throughout the state.

The survey found that the iconic blue swimmer crab is our most popular recreational species with 871,000 caught in the 12-month period. More than half of those crabs were released, demonstrating that undersize crabs are being returned and recreational fishers are embracing their stewardship role.

Your recreational fishing fees at work
The survey could not have been achieved without the support of recreational fishers.

If you purchased a Recreational Fishing from Boat Licence (RFBL) then you have helped fund this important project.

If you were chosen from the RFBL database to fill in a log book, or participated in a boat ramp interview, you can be proud that you have played an important part in helping us ensure there will be ‘fish for the future’.

Nearly 9,000 recreational boat fishers from across the State participated in the survey.
Key findings

Survey participants

2,977 recreational fishers recorded their catch and fishing effort in log books.

5,659 recreational fishers were interviewed about their catch and fishing effort at boat ramps.

- This survey included all boat-based recreational fishing, 24 hours a day/seven days a week, from public boat ramps and private access marinas and jetties.
- Survey results are from private vessels; charter fishing is not included in the results.
- Shore-based fishing was not included in the survey.

Fishing effort

By bioregion

- West Coast – 67%
- Gascoyne – 13%
- North Coast – 11%
- South Coast – 9%

By season

- 80% of fishing occurred during autumn and winter

By habitat

- 2% Pelagic
- 16% Estuarine
- 25% Inshore
- 51% Nearshore

By method

- Line fishing – 68%
- Pots – 26%
- Diving – 4%
- Nets – 2%

What fishers caught and released

Fishers reported catching more than 3.7 million finfish, sharks, rays and invertebrates (e.g. rock lobster, crabs, squid) from a range of 225 different species.

Whiting, herring and pink snapper feature prominently among the most popular finfish species while blue swimmer crab and western rock lobster were the most caught invertebrate species.

The survey also tracked the number of fish released by fishers and shows many West Australians fish responsibly to protect breeding stocks or to keep within bag and size limits.

Note: Charter fishing is not included in the results.
### Finfish

#### The catch
About 60% of the recreational catch was finfish (2.35 million) from nearly 200 scalefish species, and 15 ray and shark species. The 12 most commonly caught finfish were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fish</th>
<th>Release Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School whiting</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian herring</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King George whiting</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pink snapper</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silver trevally</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black bream</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grass emperor</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spangled emperor</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Australian dhufish</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tailor</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King George whiting</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School whiting</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian herring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Release rates
Half of the recreational catch of all finfish (52%) was released. Release rates for the 12 most commonly caught finfish were:

- Pink snapper: 81%
- Western king wrasse: 81%
- Stripey snapper: 78%
- Black bream: 73%
- Grass emperor: 66%
- Spangled emperor: 62%
- West Australian dhufish: 60%
- Tailor: 51%
- Silver trevally: 47%
- King George whiting: 36%
- School whiting: 20%
- Australian herring: 15%

Higher release rates were recorded for pink snapper, western king wrasse, stripey snapper, black bream, grass emperor, spangled emperor, West Australian dhufish and tailor.

Lower release rates were recorded for silver trevally, King George whiting, school whiting and Australian herring.

### Invertebrates

#### The catch
The other 40% of the recreational catch was invertebrates (1.36 million), including crustaceans (9 species) and molluscs (6 species).

The most commonly caught invertebrates were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Invertebrate</th>
<th>Release Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blue swimmer crab</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western rock lobster</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prawn</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Squid</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prawns</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Release rates
Less than half of the recreational catch of all invertebrates (40%) was released. Release rates for the 12 most commonly caught invertebrates were:

- Blue swimmer crab: 51%
- Western rock lobster: 37%
- Squid: 5%
- Prawns: 0% (no prawns were released)
Estimated demersal scalefish catch

The survey results have allowed us to make estimates of the total harvest (weight of catch taken) by recreational fishers of key ‘indicator’ demersal species (those living on or near the ocean floor). Monitoring these slow-growing and long-lived species gives us a good indication of the overall health of stocks of this popular but vulnerable group of fish.

The estimated recreational harvests (in tonnes) for the top three species in each bioregion were:

**Gascoyne Coast**
- Spangled emperor 35t
- Pink snapper 27t
- Red Emperor 16t

**North Coast**
- Grass emperor 16t
- Spangled emperor 15t
- Barcheek coral trout 11t

**West Coast**
- West Australian dhufish 74t
- Pink snapper 33t
- Baldchin groper 29t

**South Coast**
- Blue morwong (queen snapper) 12t
- Bight redfish 12t
- King George whiting 12t

**Gascoyne Coast**
- Spangled emperor 35t
- Pink snapper 27t
- Red Emperor 16t

**North Coast**
- Grass emperor 16t
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- Bight redfish 12t
- King George whiting 12t

**Note:** Charter fishing is not included in the results.

Where to from here?
The results of the 2011/12 recreational boat fishing survey will set a benchmark for future surveys. A similar survey will be repeated every two years with the next one already underway for the period from May 2013 to April 2014. Catch estimates from these surveys will be compared with previous surveys to see if there have been any changes over time.

We will continue working closely with our research partners at Recfishwest and Edith Cowan University to improve our understanding of recreational fishing in each of the different regions of the State and ensure WA’s fisheries remain sustainable.

A full version of the report is available at [www.fish.wa.gov.au](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au)

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