



WA Statewide recreational fishing rule changes – frequently asked questions

From **1 July 2021** we introduced new rules for recreational fishing in Western Australia which will help manage potential impacts on demersal finfish due to increased fishing activity.

The changes will have a minimal impact on day trip fishers and are a proactive management response to issues raised by the WA fishing community.

What are the main rule changes?

- **Trip limits** – the possession limit on a fishing trip is 10kg of finfish fillets from any species, no skin required, plus an additional 10kg of large pelagic species such as mackerel, tuna and shark, stored separately with skin attached.
- The existing possession limit of 20kg of fillets of any species will continue to apply at a person's principal place of residence. The possession limit of 10kg of finfish fillets and one day's bag limit of whole fish; or two days' bag limit of whole fish remains unchanged.
- Passengers on extended live aboard charter tours are exempt from the trip limit and can still accumulate up to 20kg of fillets of any species provided the fish are labelled with the person's full name, the name of the charter boat and the date the tour ended.
- **Filleting at sea** - the 30cm minimum fillet length for fish filleted at sea has been removed, however, fillets of any species transported or stored at sea must have skin attached for species identification.
- **Definition of whole fish** - the definition of a whole fish or fish trunk has been amended to allow for large pelagic species to be cut in two pieces and still be considered as one fish for storage and possession limit purposes.
- **Release weights** – the master of a boat fishing for demersal finfish by line anywhere in the State must be in possession of a release weight, including both recreational and charter skippers. This rule previously only applied in the West Coast Region.

Why have the rules changed?

Demersal finfish are typically long-lived and highly vulnerable to increases in fishing pressure. As a result of COVID-19 related travel restrictions in 2020 and 2021 there has been a significant increase in recreational fishing participation, particularly in the Gascoyne and Pilbara areas. As a result, the community has raised a number of concerns that the additional fishing activity may negatively impact the stocks of slow-growing demersal species, such as pink snapper and emperors, in proximity to popular areas.

DPIRD has introduced the new rules to help protect ocean resources and ensure sustainability to maintain quality fishing experiences for current and future generations.

How was the recreational fishing community consulted on these changes?

Peak recreational fishing body Recfishwest consulted with the fishing community and undertook a survey of its members to canvas their views and gauge the level of support for various management changes. In addition to the survey, multiple reports were received through various channels from community groups.

When will the rules be implemented and reviewed?

DPIRD has reviewed Recfishwest's recommendations and the Minister for Fisheries has approved amendments to the *Fish Resources Management Regulations 1995*. The new rules came into effect on 1 July 2021 and will be reviewed after 12 months.

Where can I find out more information about the rules?

DPIRD offices can provide advice and copies of the Recreational fishing guide. Alternatively, you can find more about the rules and other recreational fishing issues from the [Department's website](#) – which also has office contact details. If you would like to receive regular updates about recreational fishing rules, research and management, you can also sign up to our recreational fishing e-newsletter [Catch!](#)

Some of your questions answered...

Q. If the new rules are to protect demersal species, why can't nearshore species fillets make up my 20kg trip limit, after I've hit my demersal cap of 10kg – mulloway for example. Why can it only be 10kg of pelagic species fillets?

A. The new 10kg limit of finfish fillets from any species has been introduced as a proactive management response to recent increases in recreational fishing participation across the state resulting from COVID related travel restrictions. The new 'trip limit' is designed to ensure the available catch of all species is shared amongst recreational fishers. Given there is less sustainability concern for large pelagic species (such as mackerel, tuna and shark), and that fillets of these species are readily identifiable from fillets of other fish species, an allowance of an additional 10kg of fillets has been made. To ensure fisheries officers are able to enforce this allowance, all fillets of large pelagic fish in excess of your initial 10kg trip limit must have the skin attached for identification purposes.

Q. What is a large pelagic finfish?

A. Finfish are categorised according to their aquatic habitat. The complete list of large pelagic finfish, which includes mackerel, tuna and shark is listed in the Recreational fishing guide. You can also find out which species belong to the large pelagic finfish category by visiting the online rules fish.wa.gov.au/rules or on the Recfishwest app.

Q. Can I choose to make up my trip limit of 20kg of fillets with only pelagic fish?

A. Yes, you can. Under the new rules a person can accumulate up to the trip limit of 10kg of fillets of any species (including large pelagic fish), plus an additional 10kg of fillets of large pelagic fish with the skin attached.

Q. If I want to skin my fish before freezing them, when can I remove the skin?

A. Fillets may not be transported at sea with the skin off. Once you reach the mainland, you can remove the skin from up to 10kg of fillets of any species. However, the skin must remain attached to any fillets of large pelagic fish that exceed your 10kg trip limit until you return to your principal place of residence.

Q. I live in a regional area, but want to bring fish back to my family in Perth occasionally. Am I still restricted to 10kg of demersal fish when travelling to Perth, even though I'm not on a fishing trip?

A. The new trip limit applies to all fillets stored by a person other than at their principal place of residence. As you are travelling and not at your principal place of residence, you cannot have more than 10kg of demersal fillets per person. 10kg of fillets is still a generous amount of fish for a family, making 50 x 200 gram meals.

Q. What if I catch a big deep-sea demersal like a bass groper and I get more than 10 kg of fillets off it? Transporting fish like this whole in good condition is not practical. What am I supposed to do with the excess fillets?

A. When targeting large demersal fish like bass groper you need to be mindful of the new 10kg trip limit and plan ahead if you choose to fillet your fish prior to returning to your principal place of residence. If you are going to target these large fish, be prepared to share your catch and all stop fishing once each person travelling with you has reached their 10kg trip limit. You don't need to be the person who caught the fish to be in possession of a 10kg trip limit of fillets.

Q. If I have an extended stay in a static caravan for a number of months, does that count as my "place of residence", allowing me to have more than 10kg of demersal fillets in my possession limit?

A. No – your 'principal place of residence' does not include a stay in a caravan, tent, vehicle or boat. Therefore the trip limit of 10kg of finfish fillets of any species, plus 10kg of fillets of large pelagic fish with skin attached would still apply.

Q. How is DPIRD going to monitor the change in recreational catch since COVID travel restrictions to inform the review of these rules after 12 months?

A. DPIRD is currently undertaking a 12 month survey of recreational boat based fishing across Western Australia. The results of this survey will be available in early 2022 and will be compared against previous surveys, as well as current fisheries management strategies. DPIRD will consider the outcomes of this process in consultation with Recfishwest, when reviewing future management requirements.

Q. Do these rule changes just apply to the North of the State?

A. No – the new rules apply on a state-wide basis.

Q. What evidence do we have to support the anecdotal reports of increased fishing?

A. Reports from regional towns have indicated that accommodation has been fully booked outside of the usual peak holiday periods, tackle stores are experiencing record sales and greater than average levels of offal are requiring disposal at local fish cleaning stations.

This anecdotal evidence of increased fishing effort is supported by DPIRD's quantifiable data as follows:

- During 2020/21 there was a significant increase in the number of recreational fishing licences issued.
- Boat ramp camera data indicates a significant increase in the number of boat launches at key boat ramps throughout this period, compared to previous years, in particular in the West Coast, Gascoyne and Pilbara regions.

Q. What is DPIRD doing at a fisheries management level to address the shark bite-off problem – given it could be argued it's a bigger sustainability threat to demersal fish stocks than increased domestic tourism?

A. There are a number of contributing factors likely to be associated with the increasing reports of shark bite-offs (or depredation) and therefore the development of suitable mitigation measures is complex. Accordingly, a number of projects are currently being undertaken by DPIRD to better understand and address shark depredation across the State. These projects include a Recreational Fishing Initiatives Fund (RFIF) study to identify and test mitigation strategies and the effectiveness of shark deterrent devices that use acoustic, electronic or electromagnetic technologies. A series of presentations on the results of the RFIF project are being held in regional areas in the north-west of the State and Perth in mid-2021. Any measures designed to reduce depredation need to be considered in the context of the overall shark resource in order to avoid potential unintended sustainability impacts. This includes recognising that the status of some of the shark species believed to be involved in depredation are currently in recovery or listed as protected species.

fish.wa.gov.au/recfishing

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