



# MINISTER FOR FISHERIES

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## MEDIA STATEMENT

Attention: News Editor/Chief of Staff

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### **Package of changes to recreational fishing to save vulnerable species.**

Fisheries Minister Jon Ford has today announced a package of changes to recreational fishing to save some of the State's most popular and iconic oceanic fish species.

The package comes after a nine-month consultation and planning process which was triggered after scientific research showed that populations of some key 'indicator' species - including dhufish and pink snapper - were in dire straits.

The research showed that populations of 'at risk' species in the West Coast Bioregion could collapse in just a few years, unless recreational and commercial catches of these species was drastically reduced by at least 50 per cent. The West Coast Bioregion stretches from north of Kalbarri to east of Augusta.

Today, Mr Ford said the wide-ranging package of changes for recreational fishing, which would apply from October 15, was designed to ensure the sustainability of fish populations along the West Coast Bioregion and at the same time preserve the enjoyment of the recreational fishing experience for Western Australians.

"The whole point of today's package is to ensure that some of our most popular species can survive so Western Australians can continue enjoying their most favourite pastime," the Minister said.

"By acting now, we can start rebuilding stocks so they can return to sustainable numbers.

"This package will see recreational catches of some of our most vulnerable fish species reduced by more than 50 per cent in the first 16 months.

"There will be some adjustments for people to make, but the benefits of that are priceless. It means recreational fishing will become far more sustainable, ensuring a quality experience for more fishers and their families for generations to come."

Among the species to gain better protection under the package will be the so-called 'Vulnerable 5': dhufish, pink snapper, baldchin groper, breaksea cod and red snapper.

"While fishing for the Vulnerable 5 species will not be allowed for a few months every year, there will be scores of other fish species that people will be able to catch along the West Coast Bioregion.

"The entire package will not apply to people fishing for the usual fish species caught from beaches, jetties and groynes and nor will it apply to a large number of species which can be caught from boats, such as herring, whiting, skipper, tailor or squid."

The seasonal restriction will be implemented in stages, giving holidaymakers and businesses some time to adjust, particularly in the first year when the season will run from October 15 to December 25 in 2008.

The season will then run from October 15 to January 31 in 2009-10, and from October 1 to January 31 for subsequent years.

The timing and duration of the seasonal restriction were the key factors to ensure it was effective as the main tool in the package for achieving a 50 per cent catch reduction. The timing of the seasonal restriction may also provide some additional protection during the spawning season for some species.

Mr Ford said there had been positive and helpful feedback in the 1,300 submissions received during the last public consultation period, in response to recommended changes released by the Minister in March.

“The submissions helped us to fine tune the package so that it can best achieve a workable balance between the social value of recreational fishing and the need to save our fish for the future,” he said.

The Minister said that while today’s package was aimed at improving the sustainability of recreational fishing, the commercial fishing sector had already undergone considerable changes recently to make its contribution to improved sustainability. These changes included a ban on the commercial catch of scalefish and sharks in the metropolitan fishing zone.

“It is now time for the recreational fishing community to play its part to save our fish so that we can have fish for current generations as well as fish for the future,” Mr Ford said.

**Details of the package for recreational fishing in the West Coast Bioregion:**

1. The daily bag limit for Category 1 fish to be reduced from seven to four fish.
2. The daily bag limit for pink snapper to be reduced from four to two fish.
3. The size limit for pink snapper to be increased from 41cm to 45cm in October, 2008 and then from 45cm to 50cm in 2010 for the metropolitan and South-West zones only (Lancelin to Augusta).
4. A boat limit of two daily bag limits of Category 1 fish to be introduced. Where five or more fishers are on board a recreational or charter boat, an additional two Category 1 fish per person (over and above the boat limit) will be allowed for the fifth and additional fishers.
5. A seasonal restriction that prohibits the take, landing and possession of the Vulnerable 5 species: dhufish, pink snapper, baldchin groper, breaksea cod and red snapper. The season will run from October 15 to December 25 in 2008, October 15 to January 31 in 2009-2010 and October 1 to January 31 for subsequent years.
6. (a) A daily bag limit of one Category 1 fish to apply to spear fishing on compressed air.  
(b) The use of power assisted fishing reels to be prohibited (with exemptions for disabled fishers).
7. Discussions with fishing clubs to be initiated to discourage public fishing competitions from targeting high risk species.
8. The finfish possession limit to be reduced at the Abrolhos Islands Fish and Fish Habitat Protection Area to 10kg of fillets (or pieces of fish) or one day’s bag limit of whole fish. The possession limit will remain in place for at least two years

while a review to assess the option of managing the Abrohos Islands as a 'no take away' area is undertaken.

9. A voluntary logbook program to be established for Category 1 demersal fish (ocean-bottom dwelling fish), including the Vulnerable 5 species, to provide additional catch and effort information.
10. A Recreational Trust Fund to be established to enable the recreational sector to have meaningful input into determining expenditure priorities.
11. Further research to be undertaken to investigate the appropriateness of introducing large scale fish reserves or closed areas to provide protection for large numbers of fish or over an area which is particularly important to spawning.

### **Funding**

The WA Government has committed \$5.3million in additional research funds over the next four years to continue to monitor stocks and observe the impact of this recreational management package (in conjunction with the new commercial fishing arrangements). There will be an ongoing review of the effectiveness of these management arrangements.

An additional \$7.8million has also been committed to assist in education and compliance resourcing for marine finfish fisheries in the West Coast Bioregion over the same period.

Mr Ford said the further research would be vital in guiding future decisions, but he was confident that fishers and other members of the WA community were committed to the achievement of a balance between the social value of recreational fishing and the need to ensure the State's fish stocks were managed in a sustainable way.

Details of the recreational fishing management changes are available in the Ministerial Decisions Paper, which is available online at the Department of Fisheries website at <http://www.fish.wa.gov.au> Click on the 'Protecting Our Fish For the Future' icon.

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