



MINISTER FOR FISHERIES

MEDIA STATEMENT

Attention: News Editor/Chief of Staff

17/9/07

WA Government launches fishing package to save iconic fish for the future.

Western Australia's coastline between Lancelin and south of Mandurah will become an exclusive zone for recreational line fishing under a State Government move to avoid the overfishing of iconic fish such as dhufish and pink snapper.

In making the announcement today, Fisheries Minister Jon Ford said the Metropolitan Fishing Zone would exclude all commercial line and net fishing of demersal finfish.

Mr Ford said it was a significant measure that demonstrated the WA Government's commitment to ensuring sustainability of fish stocks in a metropolitan coastal region.

"Creating this Metropolitan Fishing Zone is one of the world's most innovative moves to make sure our grandkids can still catch these iconic fish in years to come," he said.

While the new Zone will exclude commercial take of demersal finfish (such as sharks and demersal scalefish), it will still allow various managed fisheries such as lobster and abalone. Demersal scalefish include iconic species such as dhufish, baldchin groper, pink snapper, red snapper and breaksea cod.

The Minister said the Zone was part of a new 'fishing management package' that would impact on the whole State, particularly the West Coast Bioregion, which stretched from Kalbarri to Black Point near Augusta.

"This package will secure fish for the future in WA by preserving key demersal fish, which new research shows are at risk of collapsing," Mr Ford said.

"New research which I'm releasing today shows that unless we take action now, stocks of key demersal fish will collapse within four to five years and these fish will all but disappear from our waters.

"Two of the 'at risk' species, dhufish and baldchin groper, are not found anywhere else in the world and WA has a responsibility to preserve them.

"I am committed to ensuring these iconic species don't become a fond and distant memory to Western Australians.

"This would be a shocking legacy for Western Australians to bear, so we must take action now to guarantee future generations are able to fish for these species."

Features of the fishing management package announced today for the WA coast are:

- Metropolitan Fishing Zone stretching from Lancelin 31°S to south of Mandurah 33°S. Excludes all commercial fishing for demersal finfish and is effective as of November. State Government funding of more than \$5million has been allocated to buy out all commercial line and demersal gill-net fishers in the Metropolitan Zone;
- New research that shows key demersal fish are under such serious pressure that stocks of these fish along the West Coast Bioregion could collapse within four to five years if action is not taken now;
- More than \$5.3million research funding over four years to undertake detailed monitoring of demersal fish catches by recreational and commercial fishers. This research will evaluate the effectiveness of management practices to rebuild these fish stocks;
- Release of a discussion paper calling for the WA community to comment on the future management of recreational fishing of demersal fish. This discussion paper is the start of a process to determine a more effective long-term strategy before July next year; and
- Interim fishing measures to protect 'at risk' demersal fish species, phased in from November until the new recreational fishing strategy is determined. These interim measures will be:
 - extending the closure to fishing for pink snapper in the Cockburn area;
 - extending the existing possession limit to place of residence throughout WA;
 - total protection for baldchin groper in the Abrolhos Islands; and
 - a limit of four Category 1 (high risk) fish per person on aquatic charter boats operating along the WA coast.

“Growing concerns about the sustainability of key demersal fish is based on evidence of escalating fishing effort, particularly by the burgeoning recreational fishing sector,” Mr Ford said.

“The number of registered recreational boats has grown rapidly as the State’s population continues to climb. Recreational fishers have also become more effective as they have quickly adopted new technology.

“In particular, global positioning systems (GPS) and high quality sounders have now become standard items on fishing boats and this has made recreational fishing much more precise and targeted.”

The Minister said the commercial fishing sector had undergone considerable transformation in the past two years and the exclusion of commercial line and net fishers from the Metropolitan Fishing Zone recognised the significance of increasing fishing pressure in the metropolitan region.

“This action will provide immediate relief to fish stocks, but further action is necessary and the burden of responsibility cannot and should not be carried alone by commercial fishers,” he said.

“Recreational fishers in WA are to be commended for the way they have supported the existing management system based on bag and size limits, but it is clear that the problems we now face require new and innovative solutions.

“The research and discussion papers show we really need to focus on cutting back the fishing mortality of our key demersal scalefish species.”

Mr Ford said interim measures were aimed at reducing the fishing pressure on key species until the consultation period was completed by July next year, when a more effective long-term management strategy would be introduced.

The discussion paper, which marked the beginning of the consultation process, is called 'Fisheries Management Paper No. 225 - Managing the recreational catch of demersal scalefish on the West Coast'. This paper, and the Fisheries Research Report No. 163 on the stock status of key species, is available from the Department of Fisheries website at <http://www.fish.wa.gov.au>

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MEDIA FACT SHEET 1

Metropolitan Fishing Zone - An exclusive zone for recreational line fishing

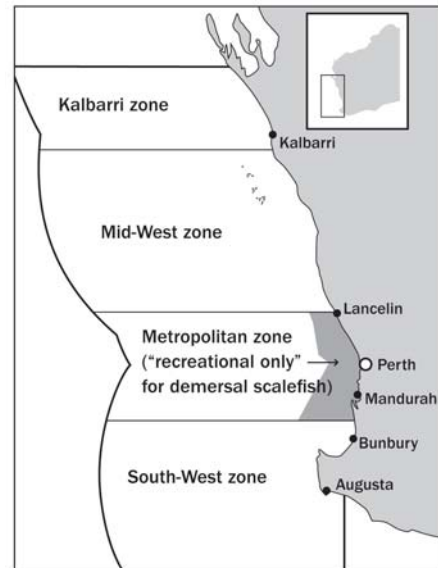
In recognition of the importance of the area for recreational fishing, the WA Government has decided to create an exclusive zone for recreational line fishing between Lancelin and Cape Bouvard south of Mandurah.

This decision recognises that the limited fish stocks are not sufficient to sustain both commercial and recreational fishing sectors.

The Metropolitan Fishing Zone will be a "recreational only" fishing zone for demersal scalefish – scaled fish that live on or near the ocean's bottom such as dhufish, pink snapper and baldchin groper.

Due to come into effect in November this year, this new zone will prohibit all commercial line and net fishing of demersal finfish.

Demersal finfish includes demersal scalefish and non-scale fish such as sharks.



Since 1996/97 recreational boat fishing activity in the West Coast Bioregion, which is between Zuytdorp Cliffs, north of Kalbarri and Black Point, near Augusta, has grown from 269,600 fisher days to 311,400 fisher days in 2005/06.

Recreational catches of dhufish have increased from 125 to 180 tonnes, and catches of pink snapper have increased from 25 to 40 tonnes.

Metropolitan waters attract 65 per cent of the recreational boat fishing activity on the west coast.

Anglers are now travelling longer distances to catch fish and do their fishing across wider areas and in deeper waters, indicating that localised depletion is occurring.

Catches in Metropolitan zone in 2005/06 were:

Species	Commercial (t)	Recreational (t)	Total (t)
Dhufish	42	65	107
Pink snapper	41	20	61

The closure of the Metropolitan zone to commercial fishers for demersal scalefish has the potential to reduce the total pink snapper catch by 41 tonnes and the dhufish catch by 42 tonnes.

There is a range of measures being introduced but if these don't abate the pressures on fish stocks then more measures may have to be considered.

MEDIA FACT SHEET 2

Interim changes for WA

As the State's population grows so does recreational fishing activity.

Despite reductions in bag limits in 2003, the overall recreational catch of demersal fish species has continued to climb over the past four years (see media fact sheet 1).

The number of registered boats in WA has also grown by 30 per cent in the past 15 years with more than 85,000 vessels now registered in WA, and plans to expand existing launching facilities, build new marinas, and nearly double the number of boat ramp lanes from 44 to 76 over the next decade.

Advanced technology that can be used to locate fish has also become much cheaper and more widely used.

In particular, global positioning systems (GPS) and high quality sounders have increasingly become standard items on fishing boats, and this has made recreational fishing much more precise and targeted.

Four interim changes to recreational fishing rules will be phased in from November and will remain in place while discussion about future management occurs:

The closure to fishing for pink snapper in Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds will be extended by two months from 1 October to 31 January.

This closure protects highly vulnerable schools of spawning snapper that occur in Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds in spring and summer. These are the major known spawning sites on the lower west coast, and many fish in them are over 10 years old, with some fish up to 25 years old caught regularly. Snapper aggregate to spawn in response to water temperature, and may change their timing from year to year.

Extend the existing finfish possession limit to also apply to the place of residence throughout WA (previously applied outside places of residence).

This measure will prevent individuals accumulating semi-commercial quantities of high valued fish in their homes, and assist Fisheries Officers in enforcing regulations that ban the sale of fish by recreational fishers.

Totally protect baldchin groper within the Abrolhos Islands.

The Abrolhos Islands are thought to support the major breeding population of Baldchin groper in the West Coast Bioregion, and have been heavily fished over the past 20 years. There are indications that stocks in many areas have been seriously depleted.

Create a possession limit of 4 "Category 1" fish per person on aquatic charter vessels operating along the WA Coast.

Charter boats are generally well equipped with fish finding technology, can fish over a wide area and are operated by highly skilled and knowledgeable skippers.

Most charter skippers understand that the future of their industry depends on maintaining a great fishing experience for their customers.

This measure will assist skippers with limiting the catch of individuals on charter boats that primarily target demersal fish. The changes will also assist in ensuring a more sustainable future for the charter sector.

MEDIA FACT SHEET 3

Consultation process to help determine long-term management for recreational fishing

The management of recreational fishing is now at the crossroads and a new management approach is required to effectively manage the recreational catch at a sustainable level.

Commercial fisheries already have in place management plans that control the commercial harvest and can be adjusted as needed.

The release of this discussion paper represents the first step in delivering a new management approach to recreational fishing that can ensure a sustainable and enjoyable recreational fishery.

This paper explains the nature of the problems facing us and presents some of the new measures we could consider.

Given the need for a new management approach, it is important to understand community views on the best way forward. Anyone who has an interest in recreational fishing is encouraged to have their say on how the fishery should be managed in the future.

Public briefings and discussion sessions by fisheries specialists will be held at major regional centres during October to help people better understand the science and the issues and to make a submission.

A range of fact sheets and educational material, as well as the discussion paper and research paper is available from the Department of Fisheries or can be downloaded from the Fisheries website at www.fish.wa.gov.au.

The first public submission period closes on 16 November 2007.

Community feedback will be taken into consideration in the development of specific management proposals, which will be released for further public comment in early 2008.

After considering community feedback the Minister will make a decision on the future management arrangements by mid 2008.