

# Fish trap trial in the Gascoyne Demersal Scalefish Managed Fishery

Department of Fisheries – January 2016

## 1.0 Background

The Gascoyne Demersal Scalefish Managed Fishery (GDSF) was established in 2010 under a mixture of output controls (i.e. quota) to manage the take of pink snapper, and input controls (i.e. effort restrictions) to manage the take of non-pink snapper demersal scalefish species. The effort restrictions included limits on the number of permitted fishing days as well as gear controls limiting operators to fishing by hook and line (maximum of 10 lines per vessel). These measures were largely carried over from the former Shark Bay Snapper Managed Fishery which operated between 1987 and 2010.

On 1 September 2015, the GDSF transitioned to full quota management with the effort limits (number of fishing days) replaced by a separate quota system for all non-pink snapper demersal scalefish. The Total Allowable Commercial Catch (TACC) for the 2015/2016 quota period (i.e. 1 September 2015 – 31 August 2016) was set at 277,668 kilograms for pink snapper and 227,726 kilograms for non-pink snapper demersal scalefish.

With the transition to full quota management, the use of gear restrictions to manage the take of non-pink snapper demersal scalefish is no longer necessary as catches will be limited to those prescribed in the TACC under the quota system. Licence holders in the GDSF have now requested that the use of fish traps be trialled in the fishery to enhance economic viability and to potentially reduce fishing mortality associated with shark depredation.

The use of fish traps to catch pink snapper and other demersal scalefish species was widespread in the waters of the Gascoyne region from the late 1950's, however, this gear type was phased out of state waters by the late 1980's to resolve conflict between the line and trap sectors and in an effort to improve product quality. The capacity to use fish traps in offshore waters of the Gascoyne region was eventually removed in early 2000. An assessment of the historic use of fish traps in the Gascoyne can be found in Fisheries Report No. 82 *'Effects of fish trapping on the Shark Bay snapper fishery'*.

Given that all species in the GDSF are now managed under a quota management framework, and with recent improvements in trap design, the Department of Fisheries is supportive of allowing industry to trial the use of fish traps in the fishery under an Exemption, before consideration is given to including fish traps as a permitted gear type in the *Gascoyne Demersal Scalefish Managed Fishery Management Plan 2010* (GDSF Management Plan).

The following proposal has been developed for the purpose of consultation with relevant stakeholders, including GDSF licence holders, the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council (WAFIC) and Recfishwest. The proposals outlined below are consistent with the management arrangements of the two other significant fish trap fisheries in Western Australia (i.e. the Northern Demersal Scalefish Managed Fishery (NDSF) and the Pilbara Trap Fishery (PTF)).

## **2.0 Summary of Proposals**

### **2.1 Trial Duration**

It is proposed that an Exemption be granted to trial the use of fish traps in the GDSF for the remainder of the current quota period (i.e. from the date of approval until 31 August 2016), and for the following two quota periods (i.e. 1 September in any given year to 31 August in the following year), concluding on 31 August 2018. This will enable the use of fish traps to be reviewed annually with a view to determining the appropriateness of the long term use of fish traps in the fishery prior to the commencement of the 2018/19 quota period (i.e. 1 September 2018 – 31 August 2019).

### **2.2 Exempt persons**

It is proposed that a class Exemption apply to all persons operating under the authority of a GDSF Managed Fishery Licence.

### **2.3 Specification of a fish trap**

It is proposed that a fish trap has similar specifications to those used in the NDSF, as follows:

(1) *Each fish trap must—*

- (a) *have an internal volume equal to or less than 2.25 cubic metres;*
- (b) *be fitted with a mesh which satisfies the specifications as described in (2).*

(2) *Each opening in the mesh of a fish trap must be square with—*

- (a) *each side of the square being not less than 50mm in length; and*
- (b) *the measurement between diagonal corners of each square being not less than 70mm.*

### **2.4 Gear identification**

It is proposed that the gear identification specifications used in the NDSF and PTF apply as follows:

*Fish traps must be attached to a surface float which –*

- (a) *has a diameter of not less than 150 millimetres; and*
- (b) *is branded or stamped with the initial letter and the licensed fishing boat number for the boat that is being used to fish in the Fishery, and each character of the brand or stamp is legible and measures not less than 60 millimetres high and 10 millimetres wide.*

### **2.5 Number of traps permitted**

It is proposed that there be no limit to the number of traps used. This will provide operators with the flexibility to trial the number of traps which suits their fishing operations. In practice the number of traps will be limited by factors such as individual quota holdings, capital investment cost and vessel size, etc. Operators in the NDSF and PTF typically operate between 10 and 25 traps per vessel.

### **2.6 Nominations**

It is proposed that when making a nomination to fish (as required under the GDSF Management Plan), the gear type and number of fish traps used is specified in that nomination.

## **2.7 Reporting requirements**

It is proposed that relevant details associated with trap fishing be recorded in compulsory daily logbooks, including:

- number of fish traps used;
- soak time (time each trap is in the waters fishing);
- number of fish trap lifts (sets);
- fishing location;
- the retained catch;
- any bycatch; and
- any interactions with endangered, threatened or protected species.

## **2.8 Other requirements**

All fishing activities, other than those being conducted under the authority of the proposed Exemption, shall be carried out in accordance with the GDSF Management Plan.

## **3.0 Monitoring and assessment**

### **3.1 Monitoring the use of fish traps**

The use of fish traps in the GDSF under the proposed Exemption will be monitored through the daily nomination requirement, the Department's satellite based vessel monitoring system (VMS), at sea inspections and compulsory daily catch returns. The trial will also include the use of on-board observers to provide an independent record of the species composition and size structure of retained fish and bycatch, as well as the level of interaction with endangered, threatened or protected species.

### **3.2 Assessment of the use of fish traps**

The use of fish traps in the GDSF under the proposed Exemption will be assessed annually to evaluate the appropriateness of the long term use of this gear type in the fishery. A number of factors will be considered in the assessment including;

- Retained catch against the established target catch limits for key species;
- Species composition of retained and discarded fish taken by trap compared with line fishing methods;
- The efficiency of traps compared to lines particularly when targeting pink snapper over the peak aggregation periods;
- Levels of interaction with endangered, threatened or protected species; and
- Levels of non-compliance with the conditions of the proposed Exemption.

### **3.3 Third party assessment**

The use of fish traps in the GDSF will also be subject to assessment under the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and will also need to be considered as part of the Marine Stewardship Council third party certification process.