

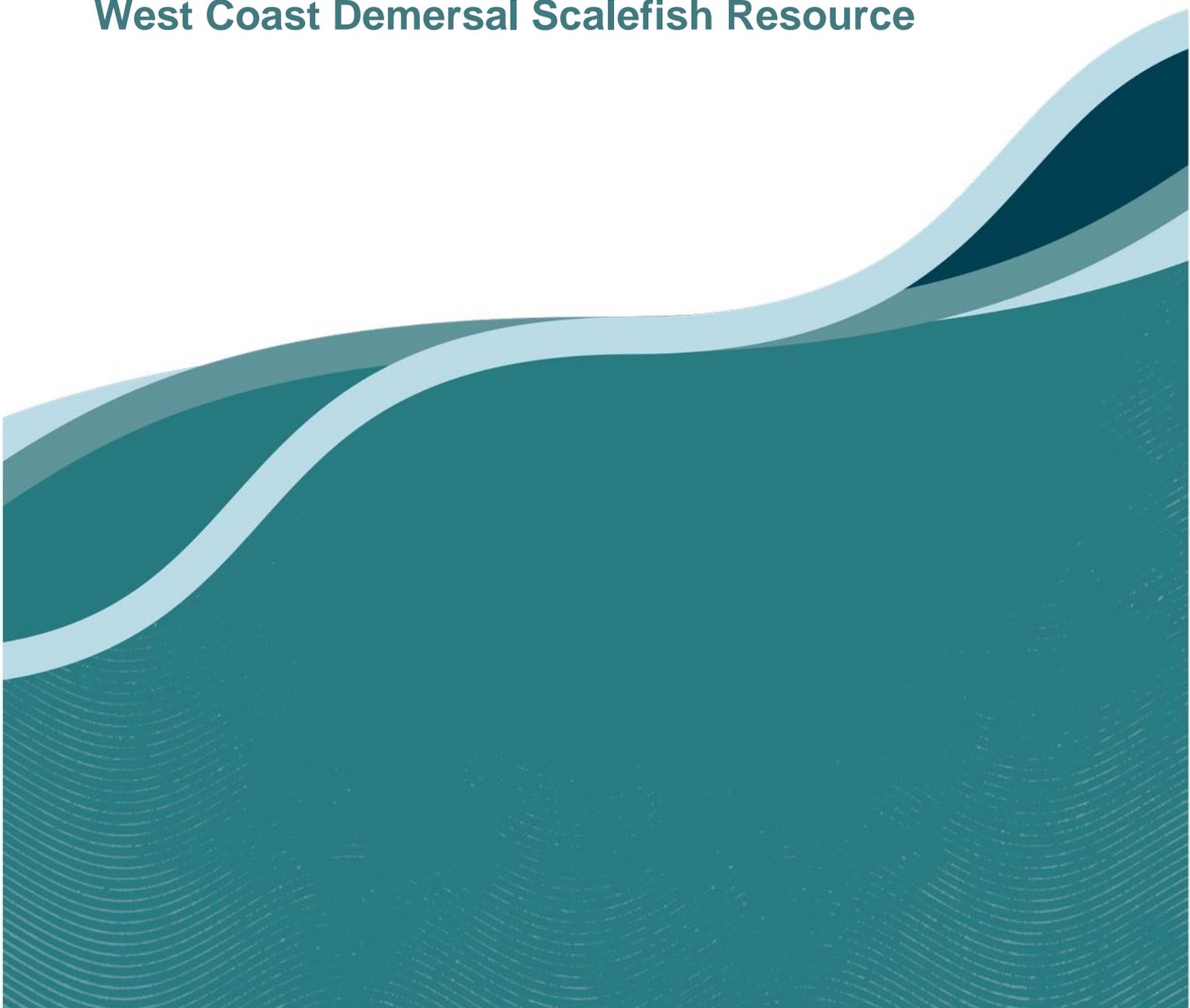


Department of  
Primary Industries and  
Regional Development

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# Frequently Asked Questions

West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource



# Recreational fishing

## New management arrangements

### What species are included in the West Coast Bioregion demersal scalefish closure?

DPIRD's state-wide [recreational fishing guide](#) contains information on which fish species are included in the West Coast Bioregion demersal scalefish closure.

You can also find a list of demersal scalefish species [here](#).

### Do the recreational demersal closures apply to shore-based fishers?

Recreational demersal closures in the West Coast Bioregion apply to all recreational fishers except recreational shore-based line fishers.

Spearfishing (from a boat or from shore), and fishing from a kayak or similar vessels for demersal scalefish is not permitted during the demersal scalefish closures.

Targeted spawning closures for pink snapper and baldchin groper apply to all recreational (including shore based), charter, and commercial fishers.

### What can I fish for during the demersal closures?

You can still target lots of other species during the demersal scalefish closure such as squid, octopus, nearshore species (such as herring and whiting), and pelagic species (such as shark and yellowtail kingfish). Western rock lobster can also be targeted if you have the relevant licence.

During the summer months, Fish Aggregating Devices (FADs) are deployed which provide greater opportunity to fish pelagic species. Please refer to the [recreational fishing guide](#) for individual species bag, boat, size, and possession limits.

### What is post-release mortality?

Post-release mortality refers to the portion of demersal scalefish that are released and subsequently die due to the impacts of fishing activities (although in the case of depredation, mortality may also occur during capture). A range of factors including stress, species biology (e.g., susceptibility to barotrauma), depth of capture, capture and handling practices, exposure time, hooking injuries and shark depredation influences the rate of post-release mortality. DPIRD has developed three post-release mortality categories for WCDSR species based on likely depth of capture, available scientific literature, and anecdotal information from fishers:

Category	Post-release mortality rate	Example species
1. Moderate	25% of released fish die	Pink snapper, Bight redfish and redthroat emperor
2. High	50% of released fish die	WA dhufish and breaksea cod
3. Very High	90% of released fish die	Baldchin groper, bass groper, eightbar grouper and hapuku

## **Why is there no spawning closure for WA dhufish?**

A targeted spawning closure for WA dhufish is not proposed as there are currently no known large spawning aggregations of WA dhufish in the West Coast Bioregion.

Targeted spawning closures benefit species that aggregate in some form and experience higher catchability during peak spawning compared to outside the spawning period.

If catchability is the same throughout the year, then the timing of the closure does not matter, because fish must survive the non-spawning period in order to be able to spawn.

## **Can I use a lure with multiple hooks?**

Yes, you can still use a lure with multiple hooks and ganged hooks provided you don't use more than one bait or lure per line when fishing for demersal scalefish in the West Coast Bioregion.

## **Can I use a maximum of three hooks when fishing for non-demersal species?**

Yes, a maximum of three baits or lures per line is permitted when fishing for non-demersal species such as King George Whiting. If a demersal scalefish is caught using more than one bait or lure as by-catch, it is strongly recommended to change your rig to avoid catching more.

## **What is high grading?**

High grading is when recreational fishers keep fishing after they've reached their bag limit, hoping for a better species or bigger fish.

The new recreational size, bag and boat limit rules are designed to allow recreational fishers to catch enough for a feed, keep the first two demersal scalefish you catch regardless of species and stop fishing once you have reached your limit.

## **Do all demersal scalefish species have an individual bag limit of two within the mixed species bag limit of two?**

Individual species bag limits of one are still in place for western blue groper, coral trout, and coronation trout.

## **Why was the individual bag limit for WA dhufish increased to two fish?**

We are trialling the removal of the WA dhufish bag limit of one within the mixed species bag limit of two. This aims to reduce the need to release WA dhufish, therefore reducing the post-release mortality rates. The effectiveness of this change is reliant on recreational fishers doing the right thing, and not high grading their catch.

Demersal scalefish species such as WA dhufish are highly susceptible to mortality following release. Statewide Recreational Fishing Surveys show that an average of around 37,000 WA dhufish are released by recreational fishers in the West Coast Bioregion each year. With a post-release mortality rate of 50%, around 18,500 of these WA dhufish die following release each year. Changes to bag, boat and size limits aim to contribute to overall fishing mortality savings to support recovery and reduce the need for fishers to release demersal scalefish, including WA dhufish.

## How does removing size limits reduce post-release mortality?

The state-wide recreational fishing survey shows that around 70% of the WA dhufish and baldchin groper released are under the minimum size limit. These species, along with many other demersal scalefish species, are known to have high post-release mortality rates. Using size limits to regulate what sized fish are removed from the population does not work well for demersal scalefish species given the low survival rates of these fish when released.

Removing size limits for demersal scalefish species reduces the need for fishers to return fish to the water that are unlikely to survive, therefore lowering post-release mortality rates.

By keeping the first two demersal scalefish you catch for a feed, including any smaller WA dhufish, baldchin groper or breaksea cod, you can help to reduce post-release mortality and help to support the overall stock recovery.

## Research, monitoring and reporting

### What is being done about shark depredation?

The research team at the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) are studying shark depredation and how to mitigate depredation events. The current findings suggest the following actions to help avoid shark depredation:

- If depredation starts to occur, move fishing spots immediately. Science has shown once it starts it will only get worse.
- Consider using deterrent devices to increase your probability of landing a fish.
- Avoid areas known to be depredation hotspots. Sharks have been known to 'learn' where to get a feed.
- Use lures and jigs instead of bait.
- Avoid catch and release fishing.
- Do not clean fish at sea, bring your fish waste back to land for composting.

## Other

### Will our licence fees change?

There will be no changes to recreational fishing licence fees. A Recreational Boat Fishing Licence is required to conduct a number of Statewide boat-based fishing activities and is not limited to fishing for demersal scalefish in the West Coast Bioregion.

There are also opportunities to target other species during the demersal scalefish effort closure.

### Where do my recreational licence fees go?

Licence fees contribute about \$8 million to managing recreational fishing in Western Australia. The State Government contributes a similar amount. A total of 25 per cent is set aside for new initiatives and 15 per cent is provided as funding for Recfishwest. The rest is spent on recreational fishing management, research, and compliance.

### What is being done to stop the flow-on effect to other bioregions?

In August and September 2022, state-wide consultation was conducted to gather views of the public regarding the current recreational fishing rules in the North Coast, Gascoyne

Coast and South Coast Bioregions to protect recreational fishing experiences and the concern of flow-on effects from changes in the West Coast Bioregion.

Review of consultation outcomes and further consultation with stakeholders is ongoing.

### **What are the implementation dates?**

All recreational measures: 1 February 2023.

Charter quota system: 1 July 2023 (in line with licensing period).

Commercial fishing hours reduction: 1 January 2023 (in line with licensing period).

### **When will these management changes be reviewed?**

Two review processes will assess the success of new management arrangements.

**Every year**, each sector's catch and effort will be reviewed against new total catch limits.

**Every three years**, following a stock assessment, a more detailed review will be conducted to make sure the resource is on track for recovery or if further management action is required

For more information on review processes, take a look at the [harvest strategy](#).

### **What are the school holiday dates?**

Dates for September/October holidays are in line with state school holidays found [here](#).

The September/October school holiday open period for 2023 begins 12:01am Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> September and finishes 11:59pm Sunday 8 October 2023.

### **What are the outcomes for the statewide recreational fishing survey: A review of statewide finfish management?**

DPIRD have consulted with the wider community to seek information on how recreational fishers view current bag, boat, size and possession limits for all demersal scalefish and large finfish species outside of the West Coast Bioregion. It is important we review our statewide rules periodically to ensure we achieve the right balance between sustainability and quality recreational fishing experiences. The outcomes of the consultation are still being considered.

## **Commercial sector**

### **Why does the commercial sector not have the same closures as the recreational fishery?**

There is an effort reduction via the number of hours they are entitled to fish for demersal scalefish. This is monitored by DPIRD through statutory catch and effort returns and Vessel Monitoring Systems. The effort reduction is likely to reduce the number of days fished per commercial line boat to an average of 20 days per year.

Unlike the Cockburn Sound pink snapper closure and the Abrolhos Island baldchin groper closure, which are designed to provide targeted protection for aggregations of spawning fish and apply to all fishing sectors, the demersal scalefish closure is one of several

management measures announced recently to meet the reduced total catch limit for the recreational fishery to allow the resource to recover by 2030.

### **How much of the commercial demersal catch is exported?**

The commercial west coast demersal scalefish fishery (line fishery) does not have Commonwealth export approval.

List of WA commercial fisheries with Commonwealth export approval:

<https://www.dcceew.gov.au/environment/marine/fisheries/wa>

## **Charter Fishing**

### **Why does the charter sector not have the same closures as the recreational fishery?**

The charter sector will be operating under a catch quota system from 1 July 2023. This system explicitly restricts the number of demersal scalefish that can be caught each year and allows charter fishing businesses to fish year-round (except the pink snapper and baldchin groper spawning closures).

### **How will the quota be distributed amongst charter operators?**

DPIRD will engage an independent expert to provide advice of the allocation of catch quota in early 2023.

### **Is there a management plan for charter until the quota system is implemented?**

Yes, all recreational rules (except the demersal scalefish effort closures), such as bag limits, size limits, and possession limits, apply as of 1 February 2023.

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