



Operational Guidelines for the West Coast Charter Demersal Scalefish Tag System

Key points

- Changes to charter fishing will come into effect from 1 July 2023 as part of the strategy to boost the recovery of demersal fish stocks from Kalbarri to Augusta.
- A new tag system for demersal scalefish will be implemented as the primary measure to manage the charter sector to its annual recovery benchmark of 20 tonnes.
- This follows management changes introduced earlier this year for recreational and commercial fishing as part of the recovery plan for the West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource (WCDSR).
- From 1 July charter operators will only be able to target demersal scalefish in the West Coast Zone if they have been allocated quota tags under the new system or have acquired quota tags from another charter operator that has been allocated tags.
- Under the new system 6,000 tags have been allocated to 21 operators in the West Coast Zone based on their catch history.
- To be eligible for demersal scalefish quota tags, charter operators must have averaged at least 355 demersal scalefish across three of the previous five licensing periods between July 2017 and June 2022.
- Charter operators who do not have quota tags will continue to be able to undertake tours targeting non-demersal species.

Operational Guidelines Explained

From 1 July 2023, all licensed fishing charter operators endorsed to fish in the West Coast Zone will require quota tags to target and retain demersal scalefish.

Only Fishing Tour Operator Licence (FTOL) and Restricted Fishing Tour Operator Licence (RFTOL) holders that have quota tags on board their charter boat can fish for, be in possession of, or land ANY demersal scalefish in the West Coast Zone. All other relevant recreational fishing rules apply.

The operational requirements of the new tagging system are explained further below. If you intend to fish for demersal scalefish in the West Coast Zone from 1 July 2023, please familiarise yourself with these guidelines.

How many quota tags are available for the charter sector?

The charter sector has been allocated 6,000 quota tags for the 2023/24 licensing period. Limiting the catch of quota species to 6,000 fish is necessary to manage the total catch of all demersal scalefish by the charter sector to its 20-tonne recovery benchmark based on species composition, average fish weights and discard rates over recent years. The number of quota tags will be reviewed prior to the allocation of tags for the 2024/25 licensing period to account for any changes in fishing behaviour resulting from introduction of the tag system.

What species need to be tagged?

Quota tags are not species specific and to make the process simple and streamlined for charter operators, only the top four demersal scalefish 'quota species' need to have a tag attached. All other demersal species may be retained without having to be tagged provided unused tags are still onboard the charter boat.

Pink Snapper



WA Dhufish



Baldchin Groper



Breaksea Cod

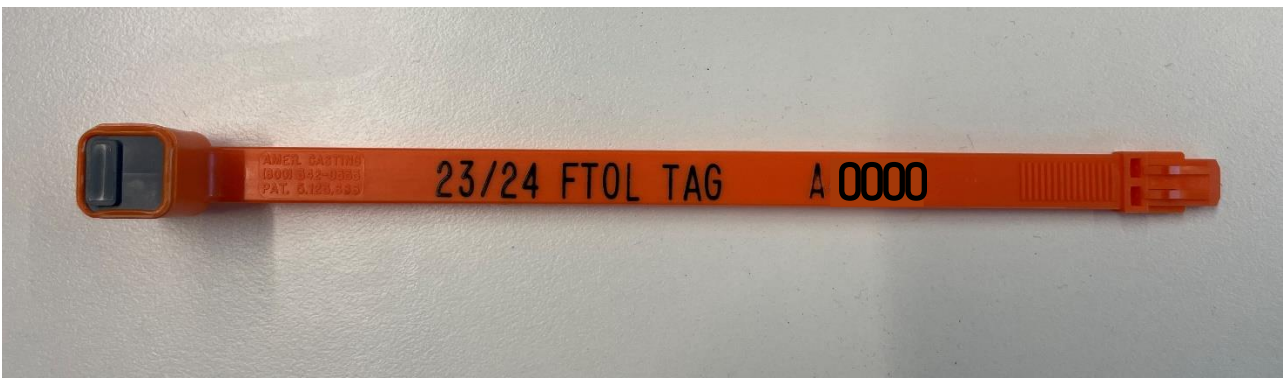


What fishing rules apply when using quota tags?

All recreational fishing rules apply, such as bag, size, and possession limits, and spawning closures. Licensed charter boats are only excepted from the recreational demersal scalefish effort closures and the demersal scalefish boat limit. For more information, please refer to the current [Recreational Fishing Guide](#).

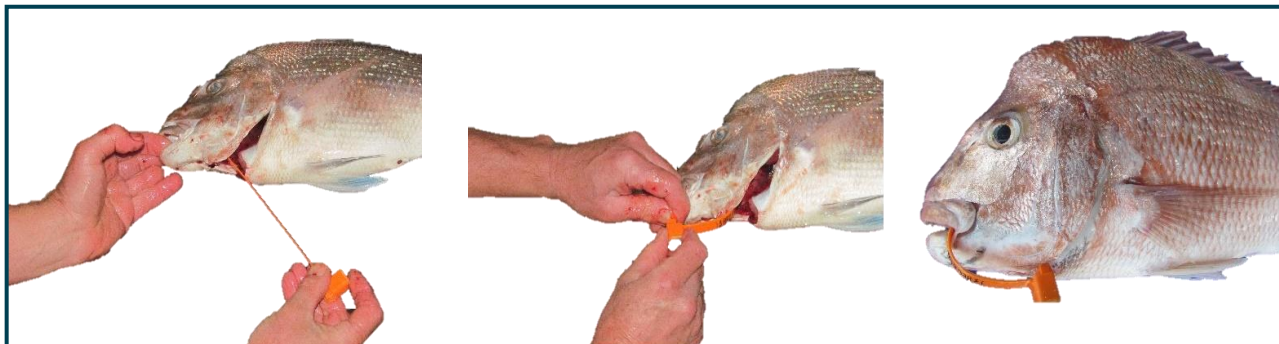
What do the quota tags look like?

Demersal scalefish quota tags have a secure locking mechanism to ensure they cannot be re-used. Each tag is printed with details of the licensing period that they are valid for as well as a unique serial number (refer image below).



What to do when a quota species is caught?

The master of the charter boat is responsible for tagging all quota species that are to be retained immediately upon capture. The tag must be attached through the mouth and gill slit (as shown). To secure the tag, feed the end into the lock chamber and ensure it has clicked into place. These tags are tamper-evident and cannot be re-used.



How do tags get reported?

The master of the charter vessel must record the serial number on each used tag and the details of the relevant quota species in a statutory logbook prior to the fish being landed ashore, or before midnight if a fishing tour involves an overnight stay at sea.

The 5-digit alphanumeric serial number must be recorded in the comments section of the charter boat's statutory logbook.

What is required when filleting a fish?

If a tagged quota species is to be filleted, the tag must be cut in half and remain with the fillets. The fillets, along with the tag, must be stored in a separate container that does not contain any other fish. This tag must not be removed until the fish is prepared for immediate consumption or landed ashore. Two fillets equal one whole fish for the purpose of determining bag limits and tag usage.

What fish can a charter boat target without tags?

Charter boats operating under an FTOL or an RFTOL can continue to fish for non-demersal scalefish species in accordance with the relevant rules. This includes nearshore species (e.g., whiting and herring), large pelagic species (e.g., shark, mackerel and tuna), squid, cuttlefish, octopus, and western rock lobster.

If there are no unused quota tags on board the charter boat and a demersal scalefish is accidentally caught, the fish must be released immediately.

Can quota tags be transferred?

Quota tags may be privately transferred between FTOL and RFTOL holders regardless of whether a licence holder was originally allocated tags. It is the responsibility of the master of the charter boat to ensure the relevant tag numbers are recorded in the boat's statutory logbook when used.

Can restricted fishing tours retain demersal scalefish?

Charter boats operating under a RFTOL are only permitted to fish for the purpose of providing a meal onboard the tour and must not land any fish at the end of the tour. Restricted fishing tour operators can only retain demersal scalefish if they have quota tags

on board, unless they are operating within the Abrolhos Islands Fish Habitat Protection Area (FHPA) where they may continue to take demersal scalefish for consumption as part of the tour and are exempt from using quota tags.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long will the demersal scalefish tag system be in place?

The current management arrangements for the recreational, commercial and charter fishing sectors are designed to recover the WCDSR by 2030. The use of a physical tag system as the primary measure to manage the charter sector's catch will be reviewed and consideration will be given to transitioning to a digital reporting system.

How long are quota tags valid for?

Quota tags are issued for use during each 12-month licensing period for the charter sector commencing on 1 July 2023. Unused tags will be forfeited and cannot be carried over into the next licensing period.

Do tags need to be sent back to DPIRD once fish is landed ashore?

Tags are not required to be sent to DPIRD once landed ashore. Fishers are encouraged to responsibly dispose of tags in an appropriate recycling bin.

How will tags be allocated in future licensing periods?

As part of the annual review process, any operational issues, industry feedback, and future allocation will be considered. Catch and effort behavioural changes will also be assessed as part of this review process and may alter the number of tags available in following licensing periods. The allocation of tags to operators that did not receive tags initially may be considered during this process.

Why can RFTOLs operate without tags in the Abrolhos Islands FHPA?

RFTOL catches represent <0.1% of the total demersal scalefish catch in the West Coast Zone. RFTOL holders at the Abrolhos Islands will initially be exempt from the tag system recognising they adopt a highly sustainable, low take, "catch to cook" fishing model. Aquatic tourism at the Abrolhos Islands will be subject to a separate future review process.

What happens once the last tag is used?

Once the last tag is used, all fishing for demersal scalefish must stop. You can now switch your fish to other species such as nearshore or large pelagic finfish.

What is the penalty for reusing my tags or fishing for demersal scalefish without unused tags?

The maximum penalty is \$10,000 for an individual, and \$20,000 for a body corporate.

Will charter licence fees be reviewed?

The licence fee structure for FTOL and RFTOLs will be considered during a state-wide charter fishery review, scheduled to commence in the second half of 2023. The state-wide review will also consider future access to the Abrolhos Islands as recommended by the *Houtman Abrolhos Islands Fish Habitat Protection Area Management Plan 2022-2032*,

aligning charter rock lobster and demersal scalefish management, and management of latent effort.

Will there be a licence buy back?

There is currently no proposal for Government to buy back FTOLs or RFTOLs. A review of the state-wide management arrangements for the charter sector will commence in the second half of 2023. This review process will consider a range of issues including latent licences.

Where can I find more information?

If you have any questions regarding the tag system, please contact the Charter Management Team by email at charter@dpird.wa.gov.au.

Important Disclaimer

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the State of Western Australia accept no liability whatsoever by reason of negligence or otherwise arising from the use or release of this information or any part of it.

Copyright © State of Western Australia (Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development), 2023.

