



Operational Guidelines for the West Coast Charter Demersal Scalefish Tag System

MARCH 2024 UPDATE

Key points

- Changes to charter fishing came into effect 1 July 2023 as part of the strategy to boost the recovery of demersal fish stocks from Kalbarri to Augusta.
- The tag system for demersal scalefish was implemented as the primary measure to manage the charter sector to its annual recovery benchmark.
- **NEW** - An additional 10 tonnes have been made available to the charter fishery while in recovery, following the outcomes of a buyout of commercial entitlement. This increases the recovery benchmark to 30 tonnes.
- Charter operators are only able to land demersal scalefish ashore 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.
- **REVISED** - For the 2023-24 season, 7,500 tags have been allocated to 33 operators in the West Coast Zone based on their catch history.
- **REVISED** - To be eligible for demersal scalefish quota tags, charter operators must have averaged at least 140 demersal scalefish across 3 of the previous 5 licensing periods between July 2017 and June 2022.
- All charter boats can continue to catch a limited number of demersal scalefish for the purpose of providing a meal for those on board as part of a tour, without the need to be in possession or use of quota tags.
- Charter operators who do not have quota tags on board can continue to undertake tours targeting and landing non-demersal species.

Operational guidelines explained

From 1 July 2023, all licensed fishing tour operators endorsed to fish in the West Coast Zone require quota tags to land demersal scalefish ashore.










Only Fishing Tour Operator Licence (FTOL) holders that have quota tags on board their charter boat can land ANY demersal scalefish ashore in the West Coast Zone. All other relevant recreational fishing rules apply.

All FTOL and Restricted Fishing Tour Licence (RFTOL) holders can continue to catch demersal scalefish for the purpose of providing a meal for those on the boat without being in possession of or having to use quota tags. All other relevant recreational fishing rules still apply.

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

The Catch Quota System – what is permitted?

The table below summarises what fishing activity is permitted depending on what licence you hold and whether or not you have quota tags on board your charter boat.

FISHING ACTIVITY	FTOL WITH TAGS	FTOL WITHOUT TAGS	RFTOL
FISHING FOR NON-DEMERSAL SPECIES (CATCH TO COOK)			
FISHING FOR DEMERSAL SPECIES (CATCH TO COOK)			
LANDING NON-DEMERSAL SPECIES			
LANDING DEMERSAL SPECIES			

The allocation decision and number of tags available

The charter sector was initially allocated 6,000 quota tags for the 2023/24 licensing period. As an outcome of the Voluntary Fisheries Adjustment Scheme for the commercial sector of WCDSR, the Minister for Fisheries has an additional 10 tonnes to the charter fishery, while in recovery.

To provide further support for charter operators in 2023-24 an additional 1,500 tags will be allocated in addition to the 6,000 tags already in circulation.

The appropriate number of tags to achieve the 30-tonne recovery benchmark in the 2024-25 season, will be determined in March-April 2024 as part of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's (DPIRD) annual review process.

Quota species

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 when landed. All other demersal scalefish species may be landed without having to be tagged provided the charter boat has tags on board.

Pink Snapper



WA Dhufish



Baldchin Groper



Breaksea Cod



Other fishing rules that apply

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](#).

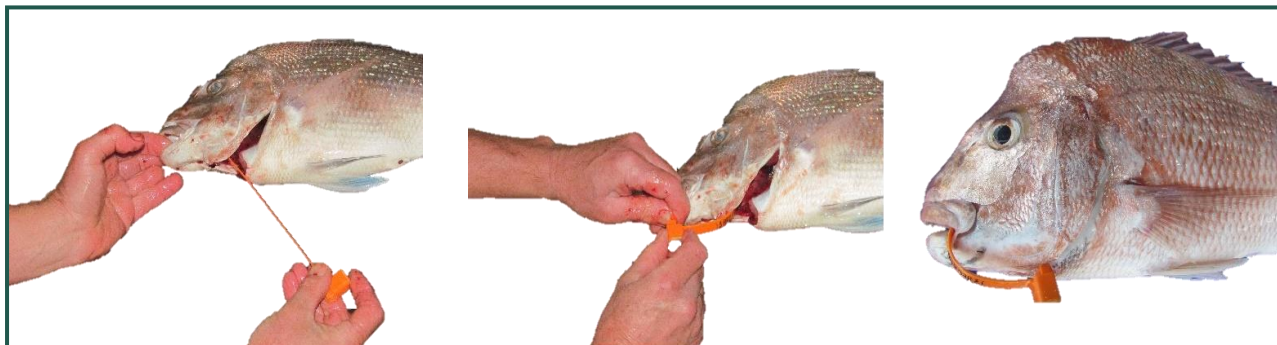
2023/24 tags

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). For the 2023/24 season, the tags are bright orange; this colour will change on an annual basis.



Securing tags to quota species

The master of the charter boat is responsible for tagging all quota species that are to be landed. 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.



Reporting tags

The master of the charter boat must record the serial number of each used tag and the details of the relevant quota species in a statutory return prior to the fish being landed ashore.

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

For all kept/landed demersal scalefish, a serial number must be present unless stated otherwise (i.e., consumed onboard).

Filleting requirements of quota species

If a landed quota species is to be filleted, the tag must remain with the fillets. The fillets, along with the tag, must be stored in a separate container that does not contain any other fish. Two fillets equal one whole fish for the purpose of determining bag limits and tag usage.

Fishing without tags on board

Charter boats operating under an FTOL or an RFTOL can continue to fish for demersal scalefish for the purpose of offering a meal for those on the boat at the time the fish were taken without having a tag on board.

FTOLs can also continue to fish for and land 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. For further information, please refer to the [Recreational Fishing Guide](#).

Transferring tags

Quota tags may be privately transferred between FTOL 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.

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. Each year, the tags will be a different colour and serial numbers will change.

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.

Is the 10-tonne re-allocation from the commercial sector permanent?

No, the new access arrangements for the recreational (including charter) sector will be reviewed once the resource has fully recovered.

Does the reallocation change the recovery benchmarks of the WCDSR?

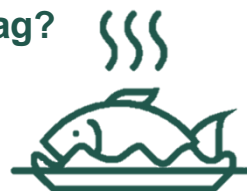
No, the new access arrangements do not change the total 375 tonne benchmark set after the 2021 scientific stock assessment showed the sustainability risk to WA dhufish and snapper remained high and severe, with unacceptable recovery rates and further catch reductions required.

How will tags be allocated in future licensing periods?

The tag system will be subject to an annual review process where any operational issues, industry feedback, and future allocation decisions 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 to continue managing the sector to the recovery benchmark of 30 tonnes.

Can demersal scalefish be eaten on board without using a tag?

FTOL and RFTOL holders in the West Coast Zone are exempt from the tag system for the purpose of consuming the fish on board as part of the tour. This will assist operators in diversifying towards alternative 'catch to cook' eco-fishing tourism experiences.



How do consumed demersal species need to be reported in logbooks?

The master of a charter boat is required to record all fish that were consumed as part of the tour in the comments section of the logbook. Without doing so, there is a tag number expected to be used for any kept quota species.

Can non-quota species of demersal scalefish be landed without being in possession of tags?

No, the master must be in possession of tags to land ANY demersal scalefish.

What is the penalty for reusing tags or landing a demersal scalefish without being in possession of 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. The state-wide review will also consider future access to the Abrolhos Islands, the rock lobster charter trial 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.

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.

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