



Operational Guidelines for the West Coast Demersal Scalefish Charter Catch Quota System

2024-25 LICENSING PERIOD

Key points

- Changes to charter fishing came into effect 1 July 2023 as part of the strategy to boost the recovery of demersal scalefish stocks from Kalbarri to Augusta.
- A quota tag system for demersal scalefish was implemented as the primary measure to manage the charter sector to its annual recovery benchmark.
- An additional 10 t 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 t.
- 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.
- For the 2024-25 season, tags have been allocated across 33 operators in the West Coast Zone based on their catch history.
- 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 possess or use 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			

Quota species

Quota tags are not species specific and to make the process simple 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 a tag attached provided the charter boat has unused quota tags on board.

Pink Snapper



WA Dhufish



Baldchin Groper



Breaksea Cod



2024-25 quota 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 and a unique serial number (refer image below).

In 2024-25, the tags are blue with white print (this colour will change on an annual basis).



Securing quota 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 below). 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 quota 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 6-digit alphanumeric serial number must be recorded in the section dedicated to quota tags of the charter boat's statutory logbook.

The logbook has recently been updated to include a designated section for quota tag serial numbers. For all landed quota species, a serial number must be present. For consumed fish (of all species), there is a new column as part of the kept number of fish.

Filleting requirements of quota species

If a landed quota species is to be filleted, the tag can be cut but 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 quota 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. Quota tags must be onboard to land ANY demersal scalefish. Catch To Cook fish must still be recorded in the statutory returns, in the new separate section of the logbook, as well as included in the total number of fish kept (CAC + landed)

Masters of a charter boat are no longer required to have the Catch to Cook exemption on board to provide these types of tours.

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, samsonfish, and tuna), squid, cuttlefish, octopus, and western rock lobster.

Transferring quota tags

Quota tags may be privately temporarily transferred between FTOL holders regardless of whether a licence holder was originally allocated quota 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.

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](#).

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. 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 quota tags will be forfeited and cannot be carried over into the next licensing period. Each year, the quota tags will be a different colour and serial numbers will change.

Do quota tags need to be sent back to DPIRD once fish are 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 quota tags be allocated in future licensing periods?

The tag system will be subject to an annual review process where catches against the recovery benchmarks, any operational issues, and future allocation decisions will be considered. Diversification and behavioural changes will be assessed as part of this review process and may alter the number of quota tags available in following licencing periods to continue managing the sector to the recovery benchmark of 30 tonnes.

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

The tag system only applies for landing demersal finfish. All FTOL and RFTOL holders in the West Coast Zone can consume demersal finfish on board as part of the tour without being in possession of tags. This assists 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 new column of the logbook, as well as included in the total kept column. This is now a statewide requirement for all operators. In the West Coast Zone, without

correctly reporting consumed fish, 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 quota tags?

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

When filleting quota species, can the fillets of one fish be in separate bags?

If you wish to separate the fillets of one quota fish into two containers, ensure the tag remains with one fillet and that the two containers are kept close together.

What is the penalty for reusing tags or landing a demersal scalefish without being in possession of tags?

The maximum penalty is \$5,000.

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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