



## **RECFISHWEST ADVICE AND RECOMMENDATIONS ON PREFERRED MANAGEMENT MEASURES TO INFORM PHASE 2 PUBLIC CONSULTATION ON THE WEST COAST DEMERSAL SCALEFISH FISHERY REVIEW**

### **Background**

The West Coast Demersal Scalefish fishery (WCDS) is of critical importance to recreational fishing in Western Australia, not just because of its proximity to the population centres of Perth, Bunbury, Busselton and Geraldton but also because of the social significance of snapper and dhufish. These fish hold a special place in the heart of fishers as demonstrated by recreational fishers driving the creation of a spawning closure for snapper aggregations in Cockburn Sound more than two decades ago. The myriad of boat names incorporating variations on the word Dhufish is another example of how this fishery has become part of the social fabric of recreational fishing in Western Australia.

The West Coast Bioregion is home to more than 90% of the Western Australian population and accounts for 50% of all recreationally caught demersal fish. This fishery creates significant economic value through boat/tackle sales and service, charter fishing and fishing tourism. A considerable portion of the \$2.4 billion recreational fishers directly inject into the Western Australian economy each year can be attributed to this fishery. Furthermore, with half of all charter trips in Western Australia occurring in the West Coast bioregion, a considerable proportion of the 831 jobs and \$110 million expenditure generated annually by charter fishing can also be attributed to this fishery.

The importance of this fishery is such that 10 years ago a 20yr recovery plan for snapper and Dhufish was established after an earlier stock assessment showed catches needed to be reduced to protect fish stocks. A stock assessment released in 2021 shows fish stocks are unlikely to recover within the 20yr recovery plan timeframe and further reductions in catches is required.

The sustainability of these critically important fish stocks is Recfishwest's priority. While the science may not be as current as we would like or reflect what many fishers are seeing on the water, it clearly shows recovery of our favourite fish is not happening as fast as had been hoped. The lack of older fish in the population remains a problem that needs to be addressed and the best way to do this is by leaving more fish in the water.

In February 2022 the Minister for Fisheries made the decision to reduce total demersal fishing mortality on the West Coast by 50%. To achieve this target, the Minister expects recreational fishers

to reduce current catches by significantly more than other sectors. While Recfishwest will always put the fish first we do not believe the Ministers decision to disproportionately impact on recreational fishers is equitable, reasonable, or justified.

In meeting the challenge to reduce overall fishing mortality, Recfishwest consulted with fishers through a survey and formed an Expert Working Group (EWG) to assist in developing advice on future management options. The EWG were guided by almost 6,000 responses to our survey. The resultant advice and recommendations in this document provide a mix of innovative and common-sense solutions we believe can meet the challenges facing this fishery.

There is no escaping the fact that meeting the Ministers catch reduction targets will result in a significant impact to fishing experiences and the viability of many small family run businesses. The EWG met seven times between April and June 2022 and assessed options on how fishing mortality could be best reduced to support sustainability objectives while minimising impacts on fishing experiences and maintaining as much of the social and economic value provided by this fishery as possible. With less fish to go around it is more important than ever to make the most of what fish are available.

The synergy between the recommendations below means this advice should be seen as a package rather than viewed individually. These recommendations have been made in the best interest of fish stocks and cannot be interpreted as support for the Minister's decision to disproportionately impact recreational fishers. Any management changes that occur should be reviewed annually to ensure new management approaches are delivering what was intended. Recfishwest understand DPIRD will develop a draft management package for public consultation that has been informed by the following advice.

It is unclear why the Minister chose to implement the catch reductions in line with Integrated Fisheries Management (IFM) allocations that were set at historic catch proportions from nearly two decades ago. When each sector was allocated a portion of this fishery in 2012 the initial allocations were seen as a starting point for resource sharing discussions. These allocations were only based on catch history and did not account for any economic or social values provide by these fish. The Minister at the time committed to implementing reallocation to better reflect the social and economic importance of the fishery *as soon as practicable*, however this commitment has never been fulfilled and consequently the government's IFM policy has failed to deliver on stakeholder expectations.

The following advice contains advice and recommendations on preferred primary management measures, supporting management measures as well as management measures that Recfishwest have considered and do not support progressing to further consultation.

### **Consideration of Primary and Supporting Management Measures**

In assessing options for the ongoing management of the WCDS, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) presented Recfishwest and the EWG with potential options that sought to reduce the benchmarks for total mortality (kept catch + release mortality) by 50%. These options were categorised based on the level of reductions that they might deliver. Those management options that could deliver significant mortality reductions were considered primary management measures, while those that could not achieve the same quantum of reductions but were still considered to be able to have a benefit, were considered supporting measures.

# Recfishwest Consideration and Recommendations on Preferred Primary Management Measures

## 1. West Coast Demersal Scalefish Spawning Closure

### Background:

Spawning closures have long been supported by recreational fishers in Western Australia. Within the West Coast Demersal Scalefish suite of species, targeted spawning closures are used as a management tool for pink snapper in Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds and for baldchin groper at the Abrolhos Islands. Spawning closures also apply for pink snapper in the Gascoyne bioregion.

### Consideration:

The EWG were provided an overview of survey results as part of their discussion, which included the following feedback on closures. Fishing closures were the number one ranked primary management measure by survey respondents, with 42% of respondents indicating that either bioregion wide closures, or targeted closures were their preferred primary management measure. When asked to provide the reason for their choice of preferred primary management measure, the most common response from these 42% of respondents was the need to protect fish while they are most vulnerable and to ensure spawning success.

While the current effort closure period of 15<sup>th</sup> October – 15<sup>th</sup> December reduces mortality by reducing recreational fishing effort over the year, it does not align to the peak spawning period for dhufish.

The following points were considered by the EWG as part of their consideration of a spawning closure:

- Regardless of species or sustainability status, protecting demersal fish during their peak spawning period is the right thing to do, especially when aggregated fish are easier to catch.
- A closure during the peak period of dhufish spawning would also provide spawning protection for other demersal species.
- Misperception that the current effort closure from 15<sup>th</sup> October – 15<sup>th</sup> December is in place to protect spawning dhufish.
- A closure of this kind is well understood and supported by the community.

The (EWG) agreed shifting the current effort closure to align with peak Dhufish spawning would provide the added benefit of avoiding impacts on dhufish spawning behaviour and thus maximizing reproductive output. For a spawning closures to achieve the highest level of community support and deliver the greatest benefit to Dhufish sustainability the EWG noted that it should be applied across all sectors. This advice is based on the survey results which indicate that this outcome is likely to be palatable and supported by the community. The WCDS EWG came to a consensus that it supported a bioregion-wide spawning closure from 20<sup>th</sup> January – 20<sup>th</sup> March for the inshore suit of demersal scalefish.

### Recommendation:

**Recfishwest recommend the current (Oct 15th – Dec 15th) fishing effort closure move to 20th January – 20th March to align with the peak spawning period for dhufish.**

## **2. Effort Control Measures**

The EWG noted that while a move of the current WCDS effort closure into a spawning closure will provide benefit to dhufish stocks through the maximization of spawning success, it is unlikely to provide a net reduction to the current level of total mortality. To meet the Ministers target for a 50% reduction of total mortality, additional management actions will be required.

There was a strong view from the community that any reduction to the current combined daily bag limit would reduce fishing experiences to a point that it was 'not worthwhile' going fishing. The community had a clear preference for a reduction in fishing effort over a reduction in bag limits.

The EWG looked at a range of primary management measures that can control effort and felt individual effort and bioregion wide effort closures deserved further exploration including seeking feedback from rec fishers as phase 2 consultation.

Neither option presented below predominates over the other and both options should be considered mutually exclusive.

### **a. The option of Limiting Individual Fishing Effort**

#### Background:

Limiting fishing effort on an individual fisher basis is commonly used in commercial fisheries where an amount of effort is apportioned to individual licences and used throughout a fishing season as the licence holder sees fit.

Given the innovative nature of this type of management for recreational fishing, the depth and breadth of its application for the WCDS fishery remains unclear but worth exploring.

#### Consideration:

One option of reducing effort in a recreational fishing context could be to allocate a set number of days per year in which to nominate to fish for demersal fish.

Alternatively, limiting individual fishing effort may take the form of fishers being provide an option to choose and nominate the times at which they reduce their individual fishing effort. This could come in the form of fishers selecting particular days or months of the year in which they don't fish for demersal species.

In the case of reducing fishing effort for WCDS, current fishing effort varies throughout the year, mostly due to weather conditions. Therefore, fishers would likely need to reduce their individual fishing effort by either two, or three months, depending on the months chosen.

This option of limiting individual fishing effort provides fishers the flexibility to choose the months in which they will not fish.

### **b. The option of a new bioregion-wide effort closure**

#### Background:

An alternative to providing people an opportunity to nominate the times at which they reduce their individual fishing effort is an option of a new fixed bioregion wide closure for all fishers

Consideration:

The discussion around appropriate timing of a bioregion wide demersal effort closure is one which considers the balance between meeting the catch reduction targets while maintaining the social and economic benefits that demersal fishing provides.

The existing bioregion-wide demersal scalefish closure, implemented in 2009, assists in reducing total mortality for demersal scalefish by eliminating recreational fishing effort over the period 15th October – 15th December each year. The end date of this closure was chosen, in part, to allow fishers the opportunity to catch a fish prior to Christmas, and for fishing related businesses to maintain trade throughout the important summer months.

Creating a demersal scalefish effort closure in a period within August – October would allow fishers the opportunity to fish from November to January 20th, and fishing related businesses to maintain trade through this important period, while still delivering the original reduction in total mortality of WCDS that the October – December period provided.

Such an effort closure for WCDS would provide the following benefits:

- Provide a clear, quantifiable reduction in total fishing mortality
- Limit the unintended catch of WCDS to incidental catches when targeting non-demersal species
- The ability to retain a combined daily bag limit of two WCDS when the fishery is open
- Provide protection to any pink snapper spawning locations outside of Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds, particularly in the mid-west

The EWG noted any new or extended demersal closure periods would be likely to have a substantial impact on the \$2.4 billion dollars recreational fishers directly inject into the WA economy each year with significant flow on efforts to fishing related businesses.

The EWG saw merit in phasing in changes to management with the establishment of the spawning closure seen as the priority and further management measures implemented once the full impact of the spawning closure is known. The EWG also noted that to maintain maximum social and economic benefits, the school holiday periods of July and October should remain open to demersal fishing.

Recommendation:

**Recfishwest recommend that DPIRD seek the views of the fishing community to further explore the options for:**

- 1. Introducing individual fishing effort limits for demersal species**

**Or, alternatively**

- 2. A fixed demersal fishing effort closure during the third school term of each year.**

# Recfishwest Consideration and Recommendations on Supporting Management Measures

## 1. Increased Monitoring and Research

### 1.1. *More timely and accurate catch and effort information*

#### Background:

While Western Australia has some of Australia's leading recreational fishing surveys and highest resolution catch estimates, there is always room for improvement for this information to be captured and reported in a more accurate and timely way.

#### Consideration:

Better data supports better decisions - more timely and accurate data is required for all sectors to better support the objectives of the WCDS management and the annual review process for this fishery. Consideration of electronic reporting systems should be a priority. This could be undertaken through the creation of a dedicated phone app or as part of DPIRD's Fisheries Digital Transformation Project.

#### Recommendation:

**DPIRD take immediate steps to implement a system that provides more timely and accurate information on catch, effort, fisher behavior, and fishing experiences.**

### 1.2. *Impacts of climate change on WCDS*

#### Background:

Fisheries throughout the world are experiencing changes because of changing climatic conditions. Over the past decade, Western Australia has experienced more frequent La Nina weather patterns that have strengthened the Leeuwin current. Many marine lifeforms follow the warm water current from the north to the south, and there is growing concern it is having impact upon various fish assemblages including WCDS species.

#### Consideration:

Anecdotal feedback from recreational fishers indicates a shift in range for many WCDS species including dhufish, which are being caught more regularly along the south coast. Many fishers are interested in the impact of climate change on the distribution, biomass, and biology of these important species.

#### Recommendation:

**DPIRD prioritise research to investigate potential impacts of climate change on west coast demersal scalefish.**

## 2. More Demersal Fish Stocking

### Background:

Stocking programs that are backed by science may provide a pathway to bolster various demersal scalefish populations, particularly those with variable recruitment patterns. The concept of stocking is well understood and supported by the broader community.

### Consideration:

Fish stocking as a potential management tool was supported by survey respondents and the EWG. This requires further investigation and investment to better understand how stocking may support recovery and improve resilience of pink snapper and dhufish stocks.

### Recommendation:

**Government invests in the knowledge, capability, and systems to better understand the feasibility and application of stocking dhufish and pink snapper to support stock recovery and/or maintaining demersal scalefish abundance.**

## 3. Better understanding the participants in the WCDS

### Background:

The WCDS fishery is one of the most popular recreational fisheries within Western Australia. Better understanding participants in this fishery will support better management.

### Consideration:

A more complete understanding of participation within the WCDS would support management through:

- Knowing the exact number of people fishing for WCDS.
- Providing a sample frame for greater accuracy in determining catch and effort
- Provide a sampling frame for which to undertake surveys on fisher behavior
- Providing a database of fishers for targeted communications material

This should not come at an additional cost to the fisher.

### Recommendation:

**DPIRD seek the views of the wider community on the concept of a register of participation in the WCDS.**

## 4. Fine Scale Spawning Closures

### 4.1. *Cockburn and Warnbro Sound Pink Snapper Spawning Closure*

### Background:

Each year Cockburn and Warnbro sounds support the only known spawning aggregations of pink snapper in the West Coast Bioregion. Protecting spawning fish is a well-known, well understood and effective fisheries management tool.

Consideration:

Demersal scalefish spawning closures, including those in Cockburn and Warnbro Sound and Shark Bay for pink snapper, and Abrolhos Islands for baldchin groper are well supported and understood by fishers.

The EWG's extensive networks provided consistent feedback about widespread confusion as to why the government was reducing recreational catches by 50% while the impact of the WESTPORT development on spawning pink snapper remains unknown.

Recommendation:

**Extend the pink spawning closure in Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds from 1 September-31 January to 1 August-31 January.**

*4.2. Abrolhos Islands Baldchin Groper Spawning Closure*

Background:

Current DPIRD research indicates that the Abrolhos Islands baldchin spawning closure does not cover the peak baldchin spawning period.

Consideration:

Spawning closures are highly supported by recreational fishers for many species and are considered an appropriate management measure in this context.

The EWG also raised the issue of concurrent planning activities for the Abrolhos Islands following the recent release of draft management plan for the Houtman Abrolhos Islands Fish Habitat Protection Area with several members having made submissions. It was felt that concurrent planning activities covering overlapping areas and species was unhelpful, distracting and leading to greater confusion.

Recommendation:

**Realign the baldchin groper spawning closure at the Abrolhos Islands from 1 November – 31 January to 1 October – 31 December to cover the peak baldchin spawning period.**

**Halt any concurrent proposals related to bag limits and possession limits as part of the Houtman Abrolhos Islands Fish Habitat Protection Area until the broader West Coast Demersal process to reduce fishing mortality by 50% has been finalised and the impacts of this process can be assessed.**

*4.3. Pink Snapper Spawning Locations Outside Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds*

Background:

Little is known about the spawning behaviour of pink snapper in the West Coast Bioregion (WCB) outside of Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds. Targeted research into better understanding potential spawning locations in the Mid-West, that may assist in providing spawning protection in this area should be undertaken.

Consideration:

Many recreational fishers ask about pink snapper spawning locations outside of Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds, including speculating as to the connectivity of Gascoyne and Mid-west snapper stocks. Any effort to better understand additional spawning locations will be supported by the recreational fishing community.

Recommendation:

**Recfishwest recommend that DPIRD actively investigate pink snapper catch/effort information to identify potential areas for a targeted spawning closure in the Mid-West/Kalbarri region, and implement spawning closures as necessary.**

## 5. Size Limits

Background:

Many species of demersal scalefish suffer from high levels of post-release mortality due to barotrauma. Current size limits create a legislative requirement for many WCDS to be released, even when their probability of survival is low.

Consideration:

The recreational fishing community are becoming increasingly aware of the role that post-release mortality plays in impacting the management of WCDS. Current size limits that may exacerbate post-release mortality in high and very high-risk demersal scalefish species should be reviewed.

Recommendation:

**Remove or reduce current size limits for species where research indicates that this measure would reduce total mortality.**

## 6. Gear Restrictions

Background:

Fishing efficiency increases with the number of lures or baits on a line. This is demonstrated through the use of multiple hooks on a line for many commercial fishing applications, where fishing efficiency is important, as well as current recreational fishing rules that allow up to three lures or baits when fishing for WCDS.

Consideration:

Reducing the number of lures or baits able to be used while fishing for WCDS will reduce fishing efficiency and therefore reduce total fishing mortality.

Recommendation:

**Reduce the number of baits or lures per line to one when fishing for WCDS species.**

## 7. Bag and Boat Limits

### Background:

The current boat and bag limits for WA dhufish may exacerbate post-release mortality through the legislative requirement to release fish.

### Consideration:

The recreational fishing community are becoming increasingly aware of the role that post-release mortality plays in impacting the management of WCDS. Fishers will support the removal or alteration of legislated measures that contribute to total fishing mortality.

### Recommendation:

**The current boat limit for WA dhufish be increased or removed if research indicates that this measure would reduce total mortality.**

## 8. Managing Offshore and Inshore Demersal Scalefish Suites Independently

### Background:

Fishing for offshore demersal species such as grey band cod and hapuku has become increasingly popular over the last decade. The fishing methods and locations for catching these species afford the opportunity for them to be managed independently of inshore demersal scalefish.

### Consideration:

Managing offshore and inshore demersal scalefish suites of species separately may provide fishers an opportunity to fish for one of these suites when they are not able to access inshore demersal species.

### Recommendation:

**Separate the management of the offshore demersal suite of fish from the inshore demersal suite.**

## 9. Shark Depredation

### Background:

Shark depredation continues to impact on total fishing mortality of WCDS, particularly in the northern part of the bioregion, both from fish being bitten while on the line, and from fish being taken after release.

### Consideration:

Shark depredation is acknowledged as one of the most pressing issues in recreational fishing in areas from the mid-west to the Kimberley. Increasing reports of shark depredation are coming from the lower west coast, including the metropolitan region.

### Recommendation:

**Future research, testing deterrents and education of fishers to be focused on practical ways to reduce the impact of depredation.**

## 10. Increased fisher education

### Background:

The knowledge and understanding of demersal scalefish biology and its impact on management has continued to increase within the fisheries management community. This has not yet translated into a detailed understanding of this by the broader fishing community.

### Consideration:

Fisher education must be a key component of the WCDS management package. It is imperative that fishers have the best understanding of issues such as post-release mortality and best fishing practices.

The EWG and Recfishwest advise that a well-resourced support package, above and beyond the capabilities of the Recreational Fishing Initiatives Fund (RFIF), Recfishwest and DPIRD be established to support and enhance education and alternative fishing opportunities which will provide benefit to over 750,000 people within the State.

The EWG noted tackle stores and charter operators are a significant education asset given their connection to fishers and that any education campaign should factor in the role these businesses can play.

### Recommendation:

**Government support, implementation of a multi-year joint education campaign to educate and inform fishers on best practices when fishing for demersal scalefish.**

## 11. Voluntary Fisheries Adjustment Scheme

### Background:

Voluntary fisheries adjustment schemes can support sustainability imperatives by leaving more fish in the water, and support commercial fishers who wish to leave the industry by giving them a well-compensated exit pathway.

### Consideration:

A VFAS would reduce total fishing effort leaving more fish in the water.

### Recommendation:

**Establish a VFAS for the WCDS so license holders who wish to exit the fishery can do so with proper compensation**

## Management Measures Not Supported by Recfishwest

### 1. Tag System

#### Background:

A tag system would provide each fisher with a set number of tags for captured west coast demersal scalefish, limiting the number of fish that can be taken each year

#### Consideration:

Given new recovery benchmarks limit the (non-charter) recreational take of WCDS to approximately 49,500 fish, and that over 40,000 RFBL holders in the WCB target demersal scalefish each year, implementing a tag system is not appropriate.

#### Recommendation:

**Do not consider a tag system as a management measure for west coast demersal scalefish.**

### 2. Extension of the Current Bioregion Wide Closure

#### Background:

The current bioregion wide closure was first introduced in 2009 to reduce total mortality for demersal scalefish. The management measure was successful in reducing total mortality by 20% and while increasing the length of this closure will lead to further reductions, it would also mean further, unnecessary impacts on social and economic well-being.

#### Consideration:

The extension of the current bioregion-wide closure will have significant impact on business and the social and mental health benefits fishing provides.

#### Recommendation:

**Do not extend the current bioregion-wide closure for west coast demersal scalefish.**

### 3. Rolling Closures

#### Background:

Rolling closures (i.e., closures with a defined area that change location over time) in areas of optimal habitat or fishing pressure may assist in reducing total mortality, although, introduce a high degree of complexity for recreational fishers to understand.

#### Consideration:

Rolling closures will be difficult for fishers to understand and may result in shifting effort to adjacent areas, reducing their effectiveness.

#### Recommendation:

**Do not consider rolling closures as a management measure for west coast demersal scalefish.**

#### 4. Complete Closure of the Fishery

Background:

A complete closure of the WCDS fishery would be the most effective management measure in reducing total mortality. However, this would also have the most severe impacts upon the social and economic benefits derived from recreational fishing.

Consideration:

Complete closure of the fishery will result in significant and unnecessary loss of social and economic well-being.

Recommendation:

**Do not implement a complete closure of the fishery for west coast demersal scalefish.**

#### 5. Establish Management Zones Within the West Coast Bioregion

Background:

Fishing effort and stock status varies throughout the WCB. The introduction of management specific to defined zones may assist in reducing total mortality, although would significantly increase the complexity of understanding fishing rules in the WCB.

Consideration:

The establishment of zones within the WCB, with management specific to that zone, was considered by the EWG. Given the likely impact of other primary and supporting management measures, this supporting measure is unlikely to provide added benefit without further complicating management arrangements.

Recommendation:

**Do not establish additional management zones within the WCB at this time.**

#### **Need to address potential recreational effort shift outside of the WCB**

The EWG noted that any changes to management of WCDS may lead to a shift in recreational fishing effort into neighbouring bioregions. This has already been observed given the differences in bag limits between the WCB and other bioregions and is likely to increase if management measures introduced into the WCB further reduce fishing opportunities.

Recfishwest believe that changes to management must be made with a wholistic view and that a review of management measures in neighbouring bioregions should be undertaken to assess any potential impacts of shifting recreational fishing effort.

#### **Need to assess fishing methods that do not contribute to post release mortality**

Many of the recommendations contain herein seek to address the issue of post release mortality. While a significant portion of demersal scalefish fishing is undertaken by line fishers, spearfishing does account for a portion of catches. Spearfishing is a selective method that can target individual species without any bycatch. It may be appropriate for this method to be considered suitable for some non-indicator WCDS at times when line fishing may be limited.

**Need to mitigate the impact of the Ministers decision to reduce recreational catches by 50%**

The Minister's Decision to reduce recreational catches by 50% will significantly impact on small family run businesses, fishing clubs, communities and tens of thousands of people who simply want to catch their favourite fish. The impact of this decision will likely reach beyond the West Coast Bioregion as people move north and south to access fishing experiences, they would have traditionally enjoyed closer to home.

Mitigating the impact of whatever management changes the Minister chooses to implement will require a package of investments. These investments should aim to keep people on the water by redirecting demersal fishing effort towards other fishing opportunities thereby ensuring the economic and social values provided by recreational fishing in the West Coast are preserved.

This package of investments will need to create new fishing experiences such as a network of FADs, freshwater fishing alternatives to trout, installation of artificial reefs for non-demersal species, and stocking to create demersal fishing alternatives. Any package should also address latent effort within the charter sector as well as direct support for fishing and charter businesses to ensure job losses and closures of small family run businesses is avoided.

Recfishwest are supportive of leveraging Recreational Fishing Licence Fees towards a package to address sustainability concerns, resolve longstanding IFM failings and develop new fishing opportunities. Such a package can be designed to leave more demersal fish in the water, address many of the recommendations Recfishwest has made, save jobs and small businesses, and finally realise the optimum use of demersal fish resources in the West Coast in line with the objects of fisheries legislation.

We thank the Department and Minister for the opportunity to consult the community using the phased approach, and we look forward to continuing to work with DPIRD to ensure that quality fishing experiences for WCDS are maintained.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Rowland', written in a cursive style.

Dr Andrew Rowland  
Chief Executive Officer

30 June 2022

## Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations on Primary and Supporting Management Measures
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recfishwest recommend the current (Oct 15<sup>th</sup> – Dec 15<sup>th</sup>) fishing effort closure be moved to 20<sup>th</sup> January – 20<sup>th</sup> March to align with the peak spawning period for dhufish.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recfishwest recommend that DPIRD seek the views of the fishing community to further explore the options for:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introducing individual fishing effort limits for demersal species</li> </ol>               Or, alternatively               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A fixed demersal fishing effort closure during the third school term of each year.</li> </ol> </li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DPIRD take immediate steps to implement a system that provides more timely and accurate information on catch, effort, fisher behavior, and fishing experiences.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DPIRD prioritise research to investigate potential impacts of climate change on west coast demersal scalefish.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government invests in the knowledge, capability, and systems to better understand the feasibility and application of stocking dhufish and pink snapper to support stock recovery and/or maintaining demersal scalefish abundance.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>DPIRD seek the views of the wider community on the concept of a register of participation in the WCDS.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Extend the pink spawning closure in Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds from 1 September-31 January to 1 August-31 January.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Realign the baldchin groper spawning closure at the Abrolhos Islands from 1 November – 31 January to 1 October – 31 December to cover the peak baldchin spawning period.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Halt any concurrent proposals related to bag limits and possession limits as part of the Houtman Abrolhos Islands Fish Habitat Protection Area until the broader West Coast Demersal process to reduce fishing mortality by 50% has been finalised and the impacts of this process can be assessed.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recfishwest recommend that DPIRD actively investigate pink snapper catch/effort information to identify potential areas for a targeted spawning closure in the Mid-West/Kalbarri region and implement spawning closures as necessary.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove or reduce current size limits for species where research indicates that this measure would reduce total mortality.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduce the number of baits or lures per line to one when fishing for WCDS species.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The current boat limit for WA dhufish be increased or removed if research indicates that this measure would reduce total mortality.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Separate the management of the offshore demersal suite of fish from the inshore demersal suite.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Future research, testing deterrents and education of fishers to be focused on practical ways to reduce the impact of depredation.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government support, implementation of a multi-year joint education campaign to educate and inform fishers on best practices when fishing for demersal scalefish.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a VFAS to provide opportunity for those commercial license holders who wish to exit the fishery and leave more fish in the water to meet the sustainability imperative.</li> </ul>
Management Measures Not Recommended by Recfishwest
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not consider a tag system as a management measure for WCDS.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not extend the current bioregion-wide closure for west coast demersal scalefish.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not consider rolling closures as a management measure for WCDS.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not implement a complete closure of the fishery for west coast demersal scalefish.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not establish additional management zones within the WCB at this time.</li> </ul>