



Minister for Disability Services; Fisheries; Small Business; Seniors and Ageing

Our ref: 77-06683

Hon Peter Foster MLC
Chair
Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs
Env@parliament.wa.gov.au

Dear Chair

Petition No. 066 – Proposed 8 or 9 month demersal bans

Thank you for your letter dated 18 November 2022 regarding *petition No. 066 – Proposed eight or nine month demersal bans*.

BACKGROUND

The West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource (WCDSR) has been in a formal twenty-year recovery plan since 2010, following a period of over-fishing in the 1990's and early 2000's. Since 2007, periodic scientific stock assessments or 'health checks' have been undertaken in the WCDSR fishery in 2011, 2014, 2017 and 2021. The most recent scientific stock assessment published in late 2021 showed that while management changes taken in the formal recovery period have halted the decline in fish stocks, there has been limited recovery and further action is needed to safeguard the future sustainability of our demersal fish species such as pink snapper, dhufish and baldchin groper.

An industry-led Harvest Strategy Reference Group (HSRG) made up of representatives from Recfishwest, Marine Tourism WA (MTWA), the WA Fishing Industry Council (WAFIC) and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development considered the latest stock assessment. In line with the *West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource Harvest Strategy 2021-2025* (Harvest Strategy), the HSRG recommended that the Government reduce the recovery benchmark for the WCDSR from 750 tonnes to 375 tonnes to meet 2030 recovery targets. In February 2022, I accepted that recommendation.

In March 2022, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD), Recfishwest, WAFIC and MTWA agreed to a two-phase consultation process to develop and implement new management measures for the recreational, charter and commercial sectors to meet the reduced recovery benchmark.

Phase 1 consultation (April-June 2022)

Recfishwest and MTWA led the recreational (including charter) sector Phase 1 consultation, seeking fishers' views and ideas on preferred management measures to meet the reduced recovery benchmark.

An outcome of Phase 1 consultation for the recreational sector included:

- On 27 June 2022, Recfishwest made a number of recommendations to Government, including the consideration of fixed effort closures and individual fishing effort limits as the preferred primary measures to be included in Phase 2 consultation for the recreational fishery.
- On 15 July 2022, Marine Tourism WA recommended consideration of a tag system as the preferred primary measure to be included in Phase 2 consultation for the charter fishery.
- Recfishwest and Marine Tourism WA also recommended consideration of changes to bag limits, boat limits, size limits, gear restrictions and additional spawning protection as the preferred supporting measures to be included in Phase 2 consultation.
- Recfishwest's advice and recommendations on preferred management measures to inform Phase 2 public consultation on the WCDSR review is published on its website at recfishwest.org.au.

Development of proposed management packages (June-August 2022)

On 30 June 2022, Recfishwest briefed DPIRD on its package of recommendations, including its preferred primary and supporting measures for consideration and inclusion in Phase 2 consultation.

On 14 July 2022, DPIRD briefed Recfishwest on its analysis of Recfishwest's submission, including preferred primary and supporting measures and the likely extent to which primary measures were required to be applied to meet the revised recovery benchmark.

On 17 August 2022, DPIRD briefed Recfishwest, MTWA and WAFIC on the proposed management packages for the recreational sector and commercial sector that would form the basis of Phase 2 consultation.

Phase 2 consultation (August-November 2022)

On 18 August 2022, proposed management packages to meet the reduced recovery benchmarks for both the recreational (including charter) sector and commercial sector were released for Phase 2 public consultation. Proposed management packages for the recreational sector included effort closures as primary measures for the recreational fishery, and a tag system for the charter fishery to the extent required to meet the reduced recovery benchmark. These primary measures were consistent with the preferred measures recommended by Recfishwest and MTWA. Both of DPIRD's proposed packages also included 15 of Recfishwest's 17 preferred primary and supporting measures.

Finalisation and announcement of a management package

Following the conclusion of the public consultation period on 30 September 2022, DPIRD continued to engage with Recfishwest, WAFIC and MTWA on the outcomes of Phase 2 consultation and made changes to the final management packages.

On Tuesday 6 December 2022, I announced new management measures for the recreational (including charter) and commercial fishing sectors. I am pleased to advise that the State Government, thanks to the cooperation of Recfishwest and DPIRD, has been able to respond to recreational fisher's desire for more time on the water by reducing the closed season to just six months of the year. This has been achieved through stronger supporting measures such as the reduced boat limit of four demersal scalefish per vessel, and reduced possession limits at the Abrolhos Islands. Additionally, the State Government has invested \$10 million to bolster the recovery of the WCDSR. This record \$10 million investment in the WCDSR fishery includes:

- A voluntary buyback of commercial fishing licenses;
- Enhanced monitoring and research including digital reporting;
- Expanding the juvenile pink snapper restocking program;
- Expanding the State-wide Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) program;
- A support package for charter operators to diversify tourism experiences; and
- An expanded education and awareness program.

Further details about the new management arrangements for the commercial and recreational (including charter) fishing sectors can be found in **attachment 1**.

RECOVERY OF THE WEST COAST DEMERSAL SCALEFISH RESOURCE

The 2021 WCDSR stock assessment shows a high to severe risk of further stock declines over the next five years at current fishing levels. The science also shows that failure to reduce fishing mortality below 375 tonnes over the summer of 2022/23 will prolong these sustainability concerns further into the future and make them more difficult to address. An extended recovery timeframe also increases the risk of further decline in stocks, particularly if we experience prolonged periods with low juvenile recruitment success, which is a characteristic of these long-lived species. A comparable situation in South Australia has resulted in the long-term complete closure of a similar fishery in that State.

The object of the *Fish Resources Management Act 1994* (FRMA) are to:

- develop and manage fisheries and aquaculture in a sustainable way; and
- share and conserve the State's fish and other aquatic resources and their habitats for the benefit of present and future generations.

Consistent with the objects of the FRMA the original proposed management packages (including proposed recreational effort closures) released on 18 August 2022 for public consultation were developed to:

- manage fishing mortality by recreational, charter and commercial fishers to the reduced recovery benchmark to enable recovery of the WCDSR to sustainable levels; and
- share and conserve the WCDSR for the benefit of present and future generations.

It became clear through DPRID's consultation that recreational fishers prefer more time on the water rather than increased amenity during limited fishing seasons. DPIRD worked with Recfishwest to consider additional, alternative measures for inclusion in the final management package that would reduce fishing mortality to the extent that would allow a longer recreational fishing season.

Recreational fishing closures for demersal scalefish do not stop all recreational fishing activities. There is still a large range of alternative, non-demersal fish species that can be targeted by anglers in the West Coast Bioregion during the closure periods including rock lobster, offshore pelagic finfish, blue swimmer crabs, marron, nearshore/estuarine fish, squid and abalone.

These alternative fishing experiences and investment in the state-wide FAD program provide opportunities for businesses to adjust their operations during demersal fishing closures and assist with the recovery of the WCDSR to sustainable levels.

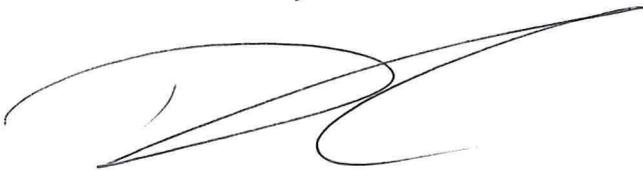
CONCLUSION

The State Government is committed to the ongoing sustainable management of Western Australia's fish and other aquatic resources. The management changes in the West Coast Demersal Scalefish fishery will have an impact on commercial, charter and recreational fishers and related businesses, but the sustainability and long-term future of our fish must come first. We must act decisively, and we must act now to safeguard the future of Western Australia's prized demersal scalefish species.

The effects of inadequate fisheries management decisions are clear. In balancing my obligations under the FRMA, I am determined to avoid the situation of a complete closure in the fishery, as has occurred in South Australia's pink snapper fishery, and the economic and social impacts that a potential year-round closure would create. The final decision and management packages reflect an appropriate balance between social, economic and ecological priorities, with sustainability being the primary consideration.

I thank the Standing Committee on Environment and Public Affairs for providing me with the opportunity to provide comment on Petition No. 066.

Yours sincerely



**HON DON PUNCH MLA
MINISTER FOR DISABILITY SERVICES; FISHERIES; SMALL BUSINESS;
SENIORS AND AGEING**

07 DEC 2022



West Coast Demersal Scalefish Recovery

New management changes will be introduced to protect the future of demersal scalefish stocks in the West Coast Bioregion (Kalbarri to Augusta).

The changes being introduced are supported by the science and will meet the reduced catch limit of 375 tonnes to get demersal scalefish stocks back on track.

The 20 year recovery plan is due to conclude in 2030.

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development will monitor the impact of the new management changes on stocks and will finalise the next stock assessment at the end of next year.

Changes for recreational fishers

On 1 February 2023, the following changes will commence, supported by an extensive education campaign:

Primary measures:

- Current two-month demersal closure extended to six months* for recreational fishers in the West Coast Bioregion, from:
 - 1 February to 31 March (inclusive);
 - 1 August to the beginning of the September / October school holidays;
- And end of the September / October school holidays to 15 December (inclusive)

**Note this does not apply to land based recreational line fishers who can now fish all year round*

**Different management rules will be used for fishing charters and commercial fishers*

Supporting measures:

- A boat limit of four demersal scalefish per vessel.
- A mixed species daily bag limit of two demersal scalefish (except coral trout, coronation trout and western blue groper).
- The dhufish boat limit has been removed, so an individual angler can catch up to two dhufish.
- Removal of size limits for WA dhufish, baldchin groper and breaksea cod to limit barotrauma.
- A maximum of one bait or lure per line can be used when fishing from a boat for demersal scalefish.
- Implementation of Abrolhos Islands wilderness fishing:
 - reduced bag limit of 1 demersal finfish;
 - reduced bag limit of 1 large pelagic finfish;
 - reduced finfish possession limit of:
 - 5 kgs of fillets; or
 - 1 day's bag limit of whole fish
- Shifting the timing of the Abrolhos Islands baldchin groper spawning closure to be 1 October to 31 December (inclusive).
- Extending the timing of the Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds pink snapper spawning closure to be 1 August to 31 January (inclusive).

Changes for charter fishers

From 1 February 2023, the charter fishery is subject to the same supporting measures as the recreational sector, except the demersal scalefish boat limit

From 1 July 2023, the following primary measures will commence for charter fishers:

- A demersal scalefish tag system for the charter fishery (one tag = one fish)
- Charter fishery open 12 months of the year (not including spawning closures).

Changes for commercial fishers

On 1 January 2023, the following changes will commence:

- Total allowable catch for the West Coast Demersal Scalefish Interim Managed Fishery will be reduced by 50 per cent.

On 1 February 2023, the following changes will commence:

- Voluntary Fisheries Adjustment Scheme to buy back West Coast Demersal Scalefish Interim Managed Fishery permits and entitlement.
- Removal of size limits for WA dhufish, baldchin groper and breaksea cod to reduce barotrauma
- Extending the timing of the Cockburn and Warnbro Sounds pink snapper spawning closure to be 1 August to 31 January (inclusive).
- Shifting the timing of the Abrolhos Islands baldchin groper spawning closure to be 1 October to 31 December (inclusive).
- Commercial fishing will remain closed along the Perth metro coast, from Lancelin to south of Mandurah.

Investing in recovery

We are investing **\$10 million** to support and monitor the recovery of west coast demersal scalefish stocks.

Key initiatives to be funded include:

- Voluntary buyback of commercial fishing licences
- Enhanced monitoring and research including digital reporting
- Expanding the juvenile pink snapper restocking program
- Expanding the State-wide Fish Aggregating Device (FAD) program
- A support package for charter operators to diversify tourism experiences.
- An expanded education and awareness program

Further information can be found at:

- ▶ www.fish.wa.gov.au
- ▶ www.wa.gov.au