

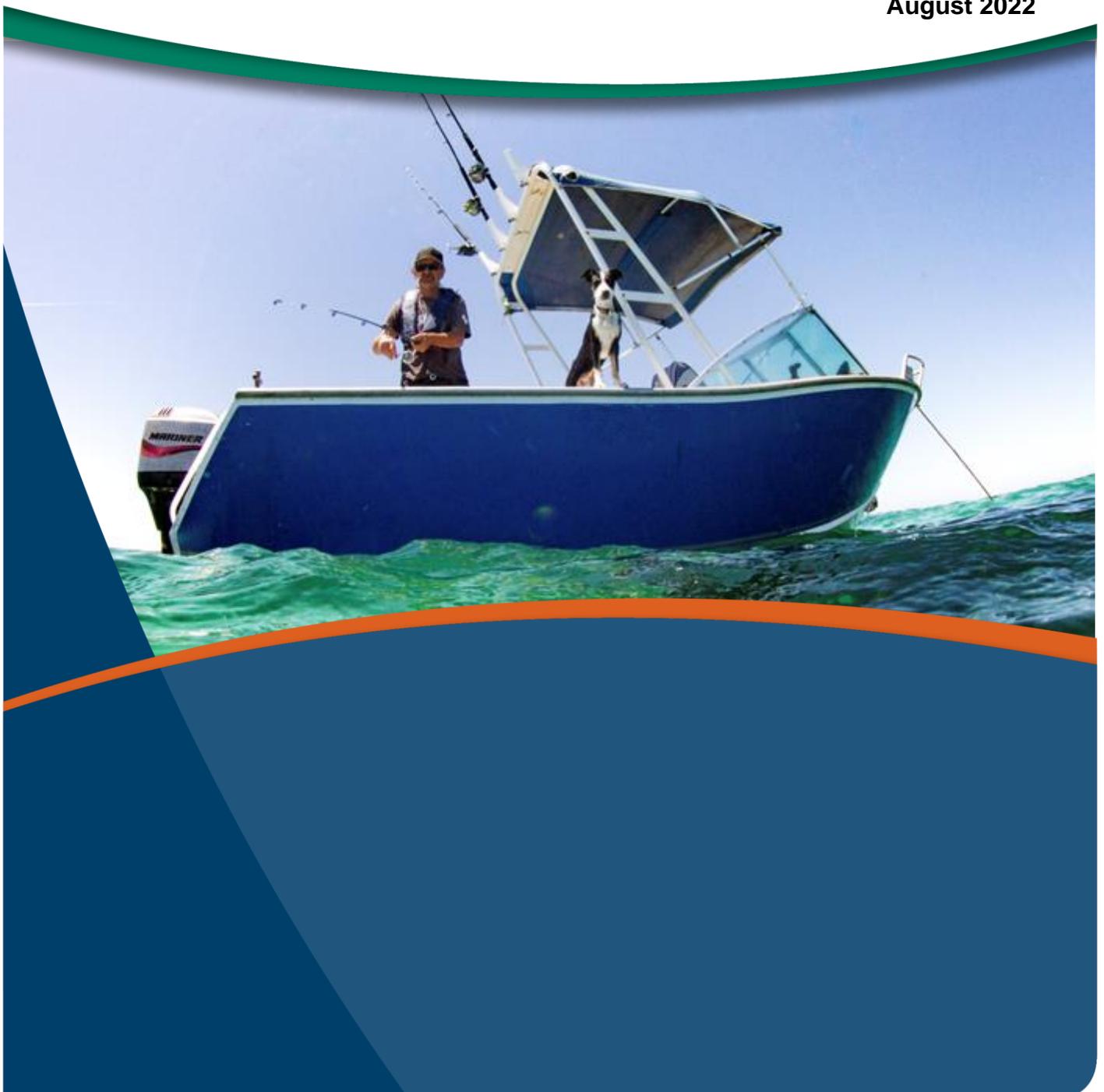


Department of
**Primary Industries and
Regional Development**

*We're working for
Western Australia.*

Maintaining quality recreational fishing experiences in Western Australia: **A review of statewide finfish management (NOT including West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource proposed management package)**

August 2022



About this document

This consultation paper seeks to gauge community views on management options to protect the quality of recreational fishing experiences in Western Australia (WA). WA has experienced increases in recreational fishing activity in recent years and the introduction of a new recovery package for West Coast Demersal Scalefish has the potential to displace more recreational fishing effort into the adjacent regions, such as the South Coast and Gascoyne, as fishers search for alternative experiences. This paper outlines a number of recreational management options for fishing for finfish in WA, that are designed to maintain the quality of recreational fishing experiences for current and future generations to enjoy.

Have your say

All Western Australians with an interest in recreational fishing are encouraged to have their say by making a submission.

Making a submission

Submissions should be made online via the [YourSay](#) consultation hub. To complete the online submission form, you will need to register on [YourSay](#) first if you have not already registered.

Before you provide feedback, please read this consultation paper.

If you need more information before making a submission, you are encouraged to:

1. Read the frequently asked questions on the [YourSay](#) consultation hub.
2. Use the 'ask a question' section on the consultation hub to ask DPIRD a question.

Note: Submissions may be published online at the conclusion of the consultation and cited in a publicly available report. Submitters who do not want their name published, or would like their submission to remain confidential, should clearly state this in their submission.

Submissions close at AWST 5pm on Friday, 16 September 2022.

If you are having difficulties making a submission, please email wcdemersal@dpiird.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 © Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, 2022.

Summary of Proposals

Statewide finfish bag and boat limits

Proposal 1.

Do you support protecting the quality of recreational fishing in regional Western Australia by introducing a total mixed species bag limit of three demersal scalefish with no individual species bag limits (outside of the West Coast Bioregion)?

A mixed bag limit of three demersal scalefish is still a generous amount of fish and is designed to ensure the available recreational catch is shared amongst recreational fishers, particularly around popular regional tourism centres. Removing individual species bag limits is designed to reduce the need to release demersal scalefish with fishers being encouraged to retain the first three demersal scalefish they catch regardless of species.

Proposal 2.

Do you support protecting the quality of recreational fishing in regional Western Australia by introducing a boat limit of three times the bag limit of demersal scalefish?

This proposal allows a boat with three or more licensed fishers on board to retain up to nine demersal scalefish on a fishing trip (outside of the West Coast Bioregion). This is a generous amount of fish and will accommodate most existing practices but prevent excessive amounts of fish being targeted and retained.

Statewide finfish size limits (also applies to commercial fishers)

Proposal 3.

Do you support maximising the overall utilisation of our fish resources by removing size limits for demersal scalefish and large pelagic finfish species with estimated post-release mortality rates equal to, or above 50%?

Minimum size limits do little to benefit overall egg production for species with high to very-high post-release mortality rates. Removing minimum size limits for these species is designed to reduce the need to release these fish and maximise the overall utilisation of our fish resources.

Statewide finfish possession limit

Proposal 4.

Do you agree that the current finfish possession limit provides the right balance between ensuring our vulnerable demersal scalefish stocks are able to be shared and enjoyed by current and future generations of Western Australians, while allowing recreational fishers to accumulate an appropriate amount of fish on a fishing trip?

The current finfish possession limit allows recreational fishers to accumulate up to;

- 10kg of fillets (or pieces) of fish of any species, plus 10kg of large pelagic fish (with skin attached for identification purposes); or
 - 10kg of fillets of any species and one day's bag limit of whole fish; or
 - Two day's bag limit of whole fish; or
- 20kg of fillets (or pieces) of fish of any species while participating on an extended fishing charter.
-

1. Introduction

Western Australia (WA) is home to some of the most exciting and varied recreational fishing opportunities in the world. With around 620,000 people fishing recreationally each year, it is part of our lifestyle. It also makes a significant contribution to our economy and attracts thousands of visitors to regional WA each year. With growing fishing and environmental pressures, we need to manage our highly valued aquatic resources sustainably to ensure there are fish for the future.

Demersal scalefish (such as tropical snapper and emperors) and large pelagic finfish (such as mackerel and tuna) are an important target species for many recreational fishers in WA. These species are managed through a suite of measures including bag, size and possession limits which are generally applied on a statewide basis. It is important that these rules are reviewed periodically, taking into account changes in fishing activity, stock levels and the communities' values and expectations over time. These reviews ensure we achieve the right balance between sustainability and quality recreational fishing experiences.

There are no known sustainability concerns with demersal scalefish stocks outside of the West Coast Bioregion (other than oceanic pink snapper in the Gascoyne region which is currently under its own recovery strategy) or large pelagic finfish stocks. However, increases in recreational fishing effort, along with increases in fishing efficiently driven by advances in fishing and boating technology, may increase the risk of localised depletion and reduce the quality of fishing experiences around popular regional tourism centres.

Catch and effort from boat-based recreational fishing has been monitored through the [Statewide Recreational Fishing Survey](#) every 2–3 years since 2011/12. The latest Statewide Recreational Fishing Survey for the 2020/21 period is due to be released shortly. Preliminary results of this survey indicate that the number of people fishing has remained relatively stable over the past decade, however, fishing effort has been gradually increasing in some areas. In 2020/21 fishing effort was the highest it has been since 2011/12, indicating recreational fishers are enjoying their chosen pastime more often each year.

Another factor which may affect regional recreational fishing effort is the current review of the [West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource](#) (WCDSR). The WCDSR is 12 years into a 20-year recovery plan and the latest science shows that more needs to be done to recovery this important resource by 2030. Options to manage the recreational, charter and commercial fishing sectors to new recovery benchmarks have been developed and are subject to a separate consultation process. Concerns have been raised by regional fishers that the necessary management arrangements for the WCDSR may result in a displacement of fishing effort into the adjacent regions as recreational fishers search for alternative fishing opportunities.

This consultation paper provides all persons with an interest in recreational fishing with an opportunity to comment on a number of proposals. These proposals are designed to safeguard the quality of recreational fishing in regional WA in light of ongoing changes in recreational fishing activity.

2. Statewide Finfish Bag Limits

The finfish bag limit defines the maximum number of fish that a person may take in any 24-hour period commencing at midnight (or midday when using a set net). Bag limits are usually set at a level to achieve various ecological and social objectives relevant to a given species or species group, such as sharing the available catch.

The current statewide finfish bag limit framework sets out a daily limit of;

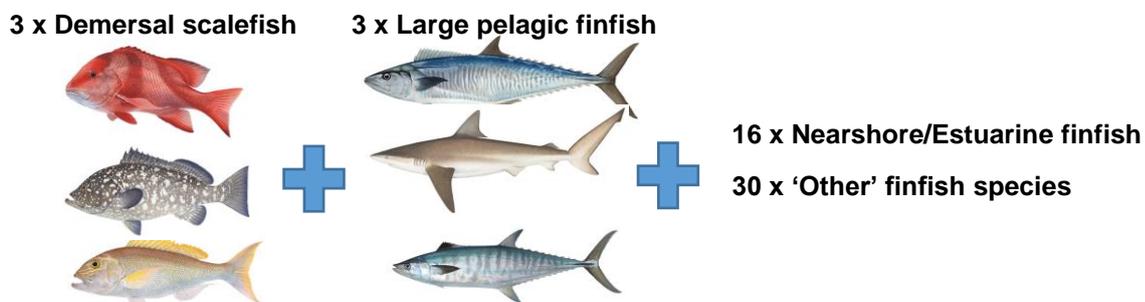
- 'Demersal scalefish' – mixed bag limit 5 (other than the West Coast Bioregion);
- 'Large pelagic finfish' – mixed bag limit 3;
- 'Nearshore/Estuarine finfish' – mixed bag limit 16;
- 'All other species of finfish' – mixed bag limit 30.

Individual species bag limits also apply within each of the above categories.

Around 60% of all Recreational Boat Fishing Licence (RBFL) holders fished the West Coast Bioregion and accounted for nearly three quarters of the total state-wide boat fishing effort during 2020/21. Additional management in the West Coast Bioregion is now required to recover the WCDSR by 2030. With reduced opportunities to fish for demersal scalefish in the West Coast Bioregion, it is likely that many fishers will increase their visitation to the South Coast, Gascoyne, Pilbara and Kimberley Bioregions to fish.

To manage any impact that a displacement of effort from the West Coast Bioregion into other regions may have on demersal scalefish stocks, it is proposed that the mixed species bag limit for demersal scalefish be reduced from five to three fish per day (outside of the West Coast Bioregion).

Example of a daily bag limit under this proposal (outside of West Coast Bioregion)



Reducing the mixed species bag limit for demersal scalefish to three also presents the opportunity to remove individual species bag limits. This revised limit leads to more simplified rules and reduces the need to release fish, many of which do not survive due to factors such as barotrauma, post-capture handling, or depredation following release.

The majority of demersal scalefish outside of the West Coast Bioregion already have an individual species daily bag limit of three. However, an individual species bag limit of one coral trout, one coronation trout, one WA dhufish, one Western blue groper and two pink snapper (from Shark Bay's inner gulf's) currently applies. Under this proposal, recreational fishers will be able to retain up to three demersal scalefish each day regardless of species.

Proposal 1.

Do you support protecting the quality of recreational fishing in regional Western Australia by introducing a total mixed species bag limit of three demersal scalefish with no individual species bag limits (outside of the West Coast Bioregion)?

A mixed bag limit of three demersal scalefish is still a generous amount of fish and is designed to ensure the available recreational catch is shared amongst recreational fishers, particularly around popular regional tourism centres. Removing individual species bag limits is designed to reduce the need to release demersal scalefish with fishers being encouraged to retain the first three demersal scalefish they catch regardless of species.

3. Statewide Finfish Boat Limit

Boat limits aim to limit the number of fish that a group of fishers can accumulate on a boat at any time. Boat limits currently apply for several high-risk or popular species including rock lobster, blue-swimmer crab, mud crab, abalone, squid, cuttlefish and octopus, and dhufish in the West Coast Bioregion. Boat limits are generally set at either two or three times daily bag limit for the species, where all persons taking a bag limit hold a relevant licence.

Recreational fishing surveys indicate that about 90% of recreational boats have three or less licence holders on board. Therefore, in the majority of cases this will be the limiting factor to how many 'bag limits' can be taken on a boat. However, if the individual species bag limits for demersal scalefish (see Proposal 1) is removed this creates the potential for a larger number of demersal scalefish of an individual species (such as coral trout) to be targeted from a boat with multiple licence holders on board. As a safeguard, it is proposed that a boat limit of up to three times the bag limit of demersal scalefish be introduced when there are three or more licence holders on board.

Proposal 2.

Do you support protecting the quality of recreational fishing in regional Western Australia by introducing a boat limit of three times the bag limit of demersal scalefish?

This proposal allows a boat with three or more licensed fishers on board to retain up to nine demersal scalefish on a fishing trip (outside of the West Coast Bioregion). This is a generous amount of fish and will accommodate most existing practices but prevent excessive amounts of fish being targeted.

4. Statewide Finfish Size Limits

The *Policy on the application of fish size limits in Western Australia* ([Fisheries Management Paper No.279](#)) outlines DPIRD's risk based approach taken to the application of size limits. This is based on a range of principles including reproductive strategies, fishing mortality, targeting and retention, social impacts and economic impacts. Information to support consideration of the application of size limits to finfish species is summarised in [Fisheries Management Paper No.280](#).

Size limits determine the size of fish which can be retained (minimum and/or maximum limits) by commercial and/or recreational fishers. Size limits are generally used to ensure fish grow large/old enough to spawn at least once before they can be retained to maintain an adequate spawning potential for a stock. Size limits are also used in

commercial fisheries to ensure fish are taken at sizes that maximises stock productivity and/or is desirable market size. However, for many demersal scalefish species, issues such as barotrauma, post-capture handling, or depredation following release, can significantly affect their post-capture survival. This can limit the effectiveness of size limits to maintain an adequate spawning potential for a stock. Likewise, many large pelagic finfish species also have issues with post-capture handling and or depredation following release.

Noting that size limits provide limited protection to maintain adequate spawning potential for demersal scalefish and large pelagic finfish with high release rates and high post-release mortality, it is proposed that the size limits for the species outlined below be removed.

Finfish species	Current minimum size limit	Estimated release rate - undersize	Estimated post-release mortality rate	Comments
Baldchin Groper [^]	400mm	77%	Very-high (90%)	Very-high post-release mortality may limit any egg production
Blue Tuskfish	400mm	82%	Very-high (90%)	Very-high post-release mortality may limit any egg production Does not reach 400mm
Breaksea Cod [^]	300mm	64%	High (50%)	High post-release mortality may limit any egg production
Blackspotted Cod (Malabar)	Max 1,000mm or 30 kg	34%	High (50%)	
West Australian Dhufish [^]	500mm	75%	High (50%)	
Emperors (Family Lethrinidae), except Spangled, Red Throat and Blue-lined Emperor	280mm	~60-70%	High (50%)	High post-release mortality may limit any egg production Many species do not reach 280mm
Red Emperor	410mm	80%	High (<50%)	High post-release mortality may limit any egg production
Western Blue Groper	500mm	NA	Very-high (90%)	Very-high post-release mortality may limit any egg production
Grey Mackerel (Broad Barred)	750mm	~40-60%	High (50%)	Issues with post-capture handling and or depredation
School Mackerel	500mm			
Shark Mackerel	500mm			
Spanish Mackerel (Narrow Barred)	900mm			
Spotted Mackerel	500mm			
Wahoo	900mm			
Mahi Mahi (Dolphinfish)	500mm	NA	High (50%)	

[^] Also being considered as part of the West Coast Demersal Scalefish review process.

Proposal 3.

Do you support maximising the overall utilisation of our fish resources by removing minimum legal size limits for demersal scalefish and large pelagic finfish species with estimated post-release mortality rates equal to, or above 50 %?

Size limits do little to benefit overall egg production for species with high to very-high post-release mortality rates. Removing minimum size limits for these species is designed to reduce the need to release these fish and maximise the overall utilisation of our fish resources.

5. Finfish Possession Limit

The finfish possession limit defines the maximum quantity of fish that a person is able to have in their possession, including at their principal place of residence.

The finfish possession limit by itself has limited capacity to manage the total recreational catch to an explicit level. Rather, it is designed limit the quantity of fish that a person may accumulate on a fishing trip to achieve a number social and ecological objectives.

This includes sharing the available catch between fishers, reducing the likelihood of localised depletion in close proximity to fishing tourism hotspots and preventing fishers from accumulating 'commercial quantities' of fish.

In 2021, the fillet component of the finfish possession limit was revised in response to concerns that increased regional tourism and recreational fishing effort resulting from COVID-19 related travel restrictions may result in localised depletion of popular demersal species.

As a result of this change the current finfish possession limit¹ now allows recreational fishers to accumulate up to;

- 10kg of fillets (or pieces) of fish of any species, plus 10kg of large pelagic fish (with skin attached for identification purposes); or
- 10kg of fillets of any species and one day's bag limit of whole fish; or
- Two day's bag limit of whole fish.

Exceptions to the fillet component of the possession limit apply to fish stored at a person's principal place of residence; or fish taken by a person participating on an extended charter fishing tour involving an overnight stay on the boat. In both cases the previous limit of 20kg of fillets of any species continues to apply.

The revised possession limit was necessary to provide greater protection for our highly targeted and vulnerable demersal scalefish stocks. At the same time it allows recreational fishers to still retain a larger amount of large pelagic finfish such as mackerel and tuna.

Preliminary results from the latest statewide survey of boat-based recreational fishers, covering the period from September 2020 to August 2021 indicates there has been a significant increase in effort (boat days). This increase has been recorded at several locations at a regional level, including the Kimberley, Ningaloo and Carnarvon/Shark

¹ Separate finfish possession limits also apply at the Abrolhos Islands, Freycinet Estuary and the Jungulu Special Purpose Zone (Wilderness Conservation) within the Lalang-garram/Camden Sound Marine Park.

Bay areas, since the previous survey in 2017/18. This information supports the introduction of the revised possession limit which provides greater protection for demersal scalefish.

In light of increasing fishing pressure in parts of regional WA, it is proposed that the current possession limit remain in place to ensure our vulnerable demersal scalefish stocks are able to be shared and enjoyed by current and future generations of Western Australians.

Proposal 4.

Do you agree that the current finfish possession limit provides the right balance between ensuring our vulnerable demersal scalefish stocks are able to be shared and enjoyed by current and future generations of Western Australians while allowing recreational fishers to accumulate an appropriate amount of fish on a fishing trip?

The current finfish possession limit allows recreational fishers to accumulate up to:

- 10kg of fillets (or pieces) of fish of any species, plus 10kg of large pelagic fish (with skin attached for identification purposes); or
- 10kg of fillets of any species and one day's bag limit of whole fish; or
- Two day's bag limit of whole fish; or
- 20kg of fillets (or pieces) of fish of any species while participating on an extended fishing charter.

Have your Say

Submissions should be made online via the [YourSay](#) consultation hub.

Submissions close at AWST 5pm on Friday, 16 September 2022.

If you are having difficulties making a submission, please email wcdemersal@dpird.wa.gov.au.