



White spot disease in prawns - FAQs for recreational fishers

What can I do to help and how do I report white spot disease?

You can do your bit by NOT using any *uncooked prawns intended for human consumption* as bait and spreading this message amongst fellow fishers. You can also help by not disposing of prawn waste (heads and shells) in, or near, waterways.

Also, check your bait prawns for any signs of white spot disease (WSD). Any prawns suspected to have WSD should be retained and immediately reported to the Department's **FishWatch 24 hour hotline** on **1800 815 507**.

1. What is WSD?

WSD is a highly contagious viral disease that affects all decapod crustaceans including prawns, lobsters, crabs and marron. The presence of the disease has been confirmed on seven prawn farms near the Logan River south of Brisbane, Queensland. The virus that causes WSD was also recently found in the QLD environment with over 100 wild prawns, caught south of the Logan River mouth, testing positive. WSD is currently NOT known to be in WA but has the potential to spread into our waterways if we do not remain vigilant.



Photo: The red arrows indicate symptoms of WSD on prawns

2. Does WSD pose a threat to human health and food health?

Infected prawns do not pose any threat to human health or food safety.

3. What is the Department of Fisheries doing?

Since the incident, the Department has taken precautions to minimise the threat of WSD to WA. The immediate response was to address the highest risk pathway for WSD to potentially enter WA. This was identified as *live prawns, bait prawns and polychaete worms* imported from the affected part of QLD, as they have the potential to go directly into WA waters. As a result, import restrictions were put in place on QLD prawns and worms, so that only those certified as low risk could enter WA.

4. What is being done about the risk of imported prawns already in supermarkets?

Another risk pathway for WSD entering WA is *uncooked prawns intended for human consumption* imported from countries where WSD is common. Despite import controls in place at the national border, several batches of supermarket prawns recently tested by the Australian Government were positive for WSD.

To address this risk, the Australian Government suspended all overseas imports of uncooked prawns for a period of six months from early January 2017. They are continuing to work with seafood importers and retailers, including supermarkets such as Coles and Woolworths, to assess and manage prawn products that have landed or is in transit to Australia. This has included working with distributors to recall prawn supplies that are of concern.

For more information, see <http://www.agriculture.gov.au/about/media-centre/media-releases/dept-action-white-spot>.

5. Why mustn't I use any uncooked prawns intended for human consumption as bait?

When fishing or crabbing in WA, it is crucial you **DO NOT** use any *uncooked prawns intended for human consumption* as bait. You can also help by not disposing of prawn waste (heads and shells) in, or near, waterways. These actions have the potential to spread the virus into WA's aquatic environment.

A widespread outbreak of WSD in WA could pose a serious threat to freshwater and marine crustaceans, including crabs, lobster and marron, in both farmed and wild fisheries. There could also be implications for the State's emerging prawn aquaculture industry, and commercial fisheries that currently enjoy a WSD-free trade status.

Across Australia, a widespread outbreak would have a significant impact on the aquaculture industry, as well as trade implications and environmental and social impacts. In prawn farm operations this disease can result in 100 per cent mortality within a few days of the appearance of visible signs of the disease.

It's not worth taking the risk!

6. Can WSD be transmitted via cooked prawns?

Thorough cooking of prawns will destroy the virus. This method was used to enable affected farmers in south east QLD to harvest and sell their prawns safely.

7. What are some alternative bait options?

Talk to your local bait supplier about alternative bait options or only buy locally-caught WA bait (sometimes the source is not labelled so check with your bait supplier that it is caught in WA). Some alternative bait options include:

- River prawns from outside the high risk area in SE QLD (e.g. from NSW)
- Local WA coral prawns
- Mulies (pilchards)
- Squid
- Sandworms
- Cockles (pipis)
- Small crabs (not mud or blue swimmer)
- Soft plastic lures
- Hard body lures



8. Where can I find more information?

- For information on WA's response to WSD including a disease alert which can be distributed to bait shops and other recreational fishers – see www.fish.wa.gov.au/Sustainability-and-Environment/Aquatic-Biosecurity/Pages/Biosecurity-Incidents.aspx
- There is some excellent information on WSD – see www.daf.qld.gov.au/animal-industries/animal-health-and-diseases/a-z-list/white-spot-disease
- For information on the QLD response - see www.outbreak.gov.au/