

Catches halved and seasonal closures planned for popular West Australian fishery

ABC Midwest & Wheatbelt / By Lucinda Jose, Joanna Prendergast, and Belinda Varischetti

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Recreational fishers are disappointed with the proposed change. (ABC Midwest Wheatbelt: Chris Lewis)

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Recreational fishers will be unable to catch iconic species such as dhufish, baldchin groper and pink snapper for up to nine months of the year, under a new plan released today.

Fisheries minister Don Punch said because of serious sustainability concerns, catches needed to halve in the West Coast Demersal fishery, which runs from Kalbarri to Augusta.

In order to reduce the fishery catch to 375 tonnes, the proposed management options released by government would see the commercial sector operating under limited fishing hours, while the recreational sector would close for six months.

A statement from the fisheries minister said:

Key points:

- The government says a popular fishery must halve its catches
- A proposal released today suggests long recreational fishery closures
- The industry says the cuts are needed

"Two options have been provided, one which allows fishing for [recreational] demersal scalefish over the popular summer and autumn seasons, or the second option which allows fishing over autumn and spring seasons to avoid the peak spawning periods for key demersal species.

"These options are designed to minimise the impact on tourism and regional jobs while supporting the recovery of demersal stocks."

The proposal would see the recreational fishery open for 94 days or 123 days.

The charter industry would be allocated a specific limit for the number of demersal species which could be retained each year.



Fisheries Minister Don Punch says reducing the catch is necessary to recover future stocks. (ABC News: David Weber)

Shocked and disappointed

Chief executive officer of recreational fishing group Recfishwest Andrew Rowland said he was shocked and disappointed with the proposed changes.

"The advice and recommendations that we put forward, important parts of those, have been largely ignored in the papers that came out for public comment today," he said.

"We've broadly supportive of taking some action, fish come first, sustainability is paramount.

"But with a limited amount of fish to go around, the question needs to be asked, 'What is the highest and best use of those fish?'"

Mr Rowland said he did not believe the proposed management changes represented the best interest of the WA community.

"This West Coast Demersal Scalefish fishery is only five per cent of Western Australia's local demersal scalefish supply. Most of it comes from the north west of the state.

"This is not the fish and chips that you buy at the fish and chip shop."

Hard decisions must be made

The Chief Executive of the WA Fishing Industry Council, Darryl Hockey said the commercial sector was broadly supportive of the proposed changes.

"It is a very difficult and challenging situation for us," he said.

"I should say that over the past 10 years the commercial fishing sector has safely stayed below the safe targets each and every year, so we haven't contributed to the problem in anyway.

"But we are certainly putting our hand up and saying we are going to be part of the solution.

"We've always argued strongly for action to be taken by government and unfortunately they have kicked the can down the road for a number of years and we've now got to this unfortunate point where some really hard decisions have to be made."

Fishery change fears



Small commercial fishers in WA say impending changes to an open access fishery on the South Coast spells trouble for them and consumers.

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