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## Recreational fishers say State Government's blunt nine month fish ban is a disgrace

Jessica Moroney, Peter Law & Steve Butler | Geraldton Guardian  
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📷 Geraldton Sports Centre's Graham Maunder says proposed recreational fishing changes will have a dramatic impact on businesses. Credit: Geoff Vivian/The Geraldton Guardian



Recreational fishers have labelled the State Government's decision to ban recreational fishing for species such as pink snapper and dhufish for nine months each year for the rest of the decade a disgrace that could decimate local businesses.

The recreational fishers who operate in the West Coast bioregion, between Kalbarri and Augusta, have been given two options – a 94-day season in staged openings from December to May or a 123-day limit from April to October, despite commercial fishing taking a share of more than 60 per cent of these catches.

Recfishwest has argued both proposals would disproportionately impact the recreational sector and instead called for alternatives, including a compensation scheme to allow commercial fishers to transition out of the industry.

Leading industry figures are adamant the changes would devastate the sector, forcing hundreds of fishing-related businesses to close, and ruin WA towns such as Jurien Bay, Green Head and Lancelin.

Recfishwest was stunned at the State Government's policy change revelations last Thursday, stating they failed to protect spawning dhufish, were inequitable and represented a "complete failure of fisheries policy".

A Recfishwest spokesperson said despite tirelessly attempting to recommend an innovative management plan, what the Government had come back with was a blunt approach that would largely affect local businesses.

"A guy in a tinny can go out and catch a dhuey for his family and it's invaluable. If you want to buy a dhufish in the shops it cost about \$90 – there's a big social value there," he said.

“There’s 40,000 people that fish for dhueys and pinkies from the West Coast demersal scalefish fishery, and there’s \$2.4 billion a year spent on recreational fishing. A portion of that would be directly spent on this type of fishing.

“At the end of the day these fish are still recovering, just not as quick as the 2023 target.”

Graham Maunder, of Geraldton Sports Centre, said there would be a dramatic impact on businesses that relied on recreational fishing sales.

“To take 75 per cent of our fishing away would not be very good for a business who is predominantly a recreational fishing store,” he said.

Mr Maunder said he was empathetic about the goal to protect fish species, but the proposal was not the right way to go about it.

“The proposal will not allow a substantially based fishing business to continue,” he said.

But Premier Mark McGowan defended the new proposal and said if the nine month ban was not implemented, there would be no fish left.

“Governments have to actually listen to the science and do what’s required to preserve the fish stocks. Otherwise, in 10 years time current fisher people or their children or grandchildren won’t have anything to catch,” he said.

Shane Younger, an industry veteran of 41 years who runs Seasport and Tackle in Jurien Bay, said the damage caused by the changes would have a snowball effect on businesses and towns.

“It will have a devastating effect on my business, the town and the towns further north,” Mr Younger said, claiming “big snapper” were being caught from the shore in numbers he had never seen.

“The two-month ban we have now are my two worst months of the year, if they turn that into eight, I don’t know what I can do. This will be a big election issue next year if this goes through, and I’ll be lining up for compensation.”