

Fisheries Minister Don Punch responds to outrage from community over ban



Steve Butler | The West Australian
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Fisheries Minister Don Punch has told WA's commercial and recreational fishing industry to 'take the pain'. Credit: Michael Wilson/The West Australian



Fisheries Minister Don Punch has told WA's commercial and recreational fishing industries to "take the pain" as they brace for new rules banning them from catching the State's most prized species for up to nine months every year for the next seven years.

Mr Punch is facing widespread backlash after revealing new restrictions aimed at rebuilding stocks of demersal scalefish, including prized species such as pink snapper and dhufish. Expected changes would mean either a 94-day recreational fishing season in staged openings from December to May, or a 123-day limit from April to October.

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.

Mr Punch refused to answer questions from The West Australian on Friday over whether he had a conflict of interest in holding both the Fisheries and Small Business Ministries.

I know some fishers may not like these proposals and I do not like having to make these changes, Mr Punch said.

"But ultimately we must do what is necessary to ensure we still have demersal fish stocks in our waters in 2030."

The West Australian revealed on Friday that the fishing industry was threatening a class action against the McGowan Government over the proposed changes. Mr Punch responded by saying operators in the West Coast region could continue to take clients fishing for other species such as large finfish and nearshore finfish.

Asked to address claims that the recreational industry had been ignored in a "token consultation period," Mr Punch said, "none of the measures proposed by the recreational sector had the potential to achieve the required reductions in total catch necessary to achieve sustainability of the resource".

He said analysis by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's world-leading scientists and management experts confirmed the proposed primary management options would achieve the necessary reductions.

Recfishwest chief executive Andrew Rowland said the fisheries in question were already rebuilding under current guidelines and was adamant there were fairer ways of facilitating that than devastating closures.



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They included closures to protect spawning dhufish and during school holidays, which would amount to a down period of about five months instead of nine, gear restrictions, tighter bag limits and other less-impacting management measures. Dr Rowland also called for a properly-funded compensation scheme to allow commercial fishers to transition out of the industry and subsequent adjustments to stock allocations.

"We want the Minister to listen to what the community is saying," Dr Rowland said.

"A devastating impact is always going to send a pretty loud message. There are hundreds of businesses and hundreds of millions of dollars at stake here."

Shadow Fisheries Minister Colin de Grussa backed claims that Mr Punch had not properly consulted the industry in relation to the demersal scalefish recovery options. He said recreational fishers felt blindsided by the options being put on the table to rebuild stocks as well as the short timeframe provided for feedback.

"Not one of the options on offer were put to industry before the Minister made them public, showing the lack of proper consultation by the McGowan Labor Government," Mr de Grussa said.



Shadow Fisheries Minister Colin de Grussa. Credit: DAVID BROADWAY

Mr Punch turned off the comments option on a post explaining the proposals on his official Facebook page, claiming he wanted any feedback to be "properly captured in the consultation process". He told 6PR on Friday that he had already been inundated with criticism.

Compleat Fishing owner Brian Marshall, who said either proposal would force immediate closure to the Nedlands business that has operated for 30 years, revealed a post on his Facebook page imploring people in the industry not to comment on the proposals had reached 24,000 people, nearly 10 times his usual reach.

“No-one agrees with either of the proposals so why should you have to pick one?” Mr Marshall said.

“Every question is aimed at satisfying the Fisheries Department or Don Punch. There is nowhere in there where the general public can have a proper say.

“Hundreds of family businesses are going to go under. People are feeling totally and utterly ripped off and that the government has too much say.”

Public comment on the two proposals will be taken until September 16.

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– **Giuseppe C** 2 weeks ago

Another star minister of the McGowan Cabinet

No clue, no idea...if they are so concerned about the environment...should stop all bauxite mining in the darling scarp...just south of perth

Check Google maps and see the devastation...bunch of hypocrites

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– **Frank C** 2 weeks ago

↩ In reply to **Giuseppe C**

That would be East....

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– **Noel W** 2 weeks ago

↩ In reply to **Frank C**

No SSE so basically south.

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– **Bill D** 2 weeks ago

No fish no business either take the hit and rebuild a sustainable fishery

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– **Phillip L** 2 weeks ago

Without some semblance of environmental control there would soon be no fish remaining in the sea.

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– **GAVIN B** 2 weeks ago

↩ In reply to **Phillip L**

What evidence do you base that on?

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– **Phillip L** 2 weeks ago

↩ In reply to **GAVIN B**

It is happening all over the world. Illegal fishing is rife.

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– **Glen B** 2 weeks ago

Another of Mclowns circus acts completely out of his depth.

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– **Peter D** 2 weeks ago

Should be some cheap boats around.

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– **GAVIN B** 2 weeks ago

Wait to the end of the seven year period when the greens will attempt a complete phase out of the fishing industry

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– **Christopher J** 2 weeks ago

Well said minister. Short sighted people will claim all sorts of things to keep their ability to wipe out important fisheries.

Thumbs up for caring about the future.

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– **GAVIN B** 2 weeks ago

Wait until the end of the seven year period when the greens will attempt a complete phase out of the fishing industry

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– **Katrina P** 2 weeks ago

Typical of a government with a huge majority. It breeds arrogance and they just don't care.

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