

# Minister's message to industry: 'Go fish'

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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 a 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 interests 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 near-shore 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".