

Premier bites on fish ban

Warns ocean stocks will run out as storm erupts over planned restrictions

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Mark McGowan says a ban on recreational fishing for species such as pink snapper and dhufish for nine months each year for the rest of the decade is needed because without drastic change “there won’t be any fish”.

The Premier issued the warning — which he said was based on science — as the State Government faced an angry backlash after announcing new restrictions that aim to rebuild stocks of demersal scalefish by 2030.

The recreational fishers who operate in the west coast bio-region, 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.

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.

“We’re putting it out for con-

sultation but all of the science says that the decline in fish stocks needs remedial action. If you don’t do something, in five or 10 years time, there won’t be any fish,” Mr McGowan said.

“Now what’s a government supposed to do? Just let all the fish stocks go? Let them all disappear? Get below reproductive capacity so we can’t have some of those iconic species still available in waters around here for both fishing and also for ecological purposes?”

“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.”

The Government has said the two options were designed to avoid peak spawning periods for key demersal species, while minimising the impact on tourism and regional jobs.

A tag system is proposed for charter operators, with limits on the number of demersal scalefish that can be retained each year. This would allow

charter businesses to fish for these species “all year round”.

Mr McGowan said there was a constant “battle” between recreational and commercial fishers and the Government’s responsibility was to strike a balance “for the entire community”.

Amid the threat of a class action from the fishing industry, the Premier opened the door to the potential for financial compensation for small businesses impacted by the changes, which would last seven years.

“They’re the issues we’re working through,” he said.