

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Management changes for Western Australia's demersal scalefish resources

The following are responses to frequently asked questions regarding changes to the management of WA's demersal scalefish resources.

1. All sectors

What management changes will occur on the west coast?

To support the recovery of demersal scalefish in the west coast, the Minister for Fisheries has approved:

- From 16 December 2025, temporary closure to recreational fishing for demersal scalefish (excluding land-based fishing).
- From 16 December 2025, temporary closure to charter fishing for demersal scalefish in the metropolitan zone. Charter fishing for demersal scalefish outside of the metro will be permitted under a reduced annual catch limit of 25 tonnes.
- From 1 January 2026, closure of commercial line and gillnet fishing for demersal scalefish in the west coast.

When will the west coast reopen?

The west coast will reopen to demersal fishing:

- In Spring 2027 for boat-based recreational fishers and for charter fishers in the metro zone.
- In 2028 for commercial line fishing in the Kalbarri area.

Will the government be providing a support package?

The Cook Government has committed to a $29.25 million fisheries support package including:

- $20 million to buy out commercial line and gillnet licences in the west coast
- $3.3 million to support and encourage alternative species fishing opportunities for recreational fishers through a tackle store rebate scheme
- $1.9 million for Fish Aggregation Devices (FADs) to support and encourage alternative species fishing opportunities

What were the outcomes from the 'Have Your Say' survey?

A total of 2,314 submissions were received through the 'Have Your Say' survey. The most frequently raised themes included:

- Closures to be aligned with spawning seasons
- Reduction in commercial and recreational catches
- Mandatory recreational reporting
- Buyout of the commercial sector
- Reduction in boat and bag limits for recreational fishers.

2. Recreational fishing

Will the west coast re-open to recreational fishers on 16 December?

No. All recreational fishing for demersal scalefish (excluding land-based fishing) in the west coast will remain closed from 16 December 2025 and reopen for a short season in Spring 2027.

Can I still fish from shore for demersal scalefish in the west coast?

Yes, recreational fishing for demersal scalefish is permitted by land-based line fishing (including drone fishing) and land-based spearfishing in the west coast region. Note land-based spearfishers are NOT permitted to fish for WA dhufish.

How many recreational fishers will be impacted by the demersal closure in the west coast?

Around 37,000 boat-based fishers targeted demersal scalefish in the west coast in 2023-24. While the demersal closure is in effect, there are plenty of other species to fish for including western rock lobster, blue swimmer crabs, squid, octopus, nearshore finfish species like whiting, herring and skippy, and pelagic finfish species like tuna, mackerel and mahi mahi.

Will I get a refund on my Recreational Fishing from a Boat Licence?

No. The Recreational Fishing from a Boat Licence allows fishers to undertake lots of different boat-based fishing experiences across WA and is not limited to fishing for demersal scalefish in the west coast.

Will mandatory catch reporting be introduced for recreational fishers? If so, when?

Real-time reporting for recreational fishers catching demersal scalefish will be introduced statewide in 2027.

Will real-time catch reporting for recreational fishers apply to all fish species or just demersal fish?

Real-time catch reporting for recreational fishers will apply to all key demersal scalefish species in Western Australia.

Why is land-based recreational fishing for demersal scalefish in the west coast permitted?

The take of demersal scalefish by land-based fishing is relatively low. The Department will continue to monitor recreational catch by land-based fishers, including through the annual metro monitoring program.

Why can't I target offshore demersal scalefish species such as hapuka and bass groper during the west coast closure?

When fishing in deep water to target offshore demersal species, it is possible to catch some inshore demersal species, particularly pink snapper. These fish will have a high chance of dying from barotrauma.

3. Charter fishing

Can I still go on a fishing charter to catch demersal scalefish in the west coast?

Yes, outside of the metropolitan zone (from Lancelin to Preston Beach).

Why are charter operators still allowed to fish for and retain demersal scalefish outside of the metro zone in the west coast?

The west coast charter fishery has operated under a tag system since 2023, which has successfully maintained charter catch below benchmark levels. From 1 July 2026, charter operators in the west coast will be reduced to an annual catch limit of 25 tonnes of demersal scalefish.

This ensures there are still opportunities to fish for demersal scalefish in the regions, at restricted limits.

Will I still be able to eat my catch while on a fishing charter in the west coast?

From 1 November 2026, 'catch-to-cook' arrangements for demersal scalefish on charter boats will no longer be permitted unless tags are on-board and used on quota species.

4. Commercial fishing

What changes will occur to commercial fisheries for demersal scalefish outside of the west coast?

From 1 January 2026, 50% commercial catch reductions will be implemented for commercial fisheries targeting demersal in the Kimberley, Pilbara and South Coast regions. This includes the permanent closure to trawl fishing for demersal scalefish in the Pilbara.

How many commercial operators are impacted by the changes?

At least 170 commercial fishing businesses across the State will be impacted.

Will commercial fishers still be allowed to fish for and retain demersal scalefish in the west coast?

Commercial fishing for demersal scalefish in the west coast will not be permitted from 1 January 2026. This includes a permanent closure to commercial line and gillnet fishing.

Will commercial fishers be compensated for the permanent closures?

A compulsory fisheries adjustment scheme for commercial demersal fishing licences will take place in 2026 to buy-out commercial line and gillnet catch entitlement in permanently closed areas.

Why is the buy-out just for some commercial fishers and not others?

The compulsory buy-out only applies to the commercial fisheries that will be permanently closed.

What do the changes mean for local seafood supply?

These changes will result in an annual reduction of ~2,500 tonnes in the supply of local fish to the WA and domestic market.

Will WA have to import more seafood?

The decline in local commercial catch will likely result in more fish being imported to meet demand.

5. Monitoring and compliance

How will the west coast recovery be tracked when recreational and commercial fisheries are closed?

Commercial and recreational fishing data is an important input into stock assessments. Without this source of data, DPIRD will develop and undertake independent surveys to continue monitoring fish stocks and track recovery.

How will compliance of the changes and closures be undertaken?

To monitor compliance with new rules DPIRD will continue to undertake visible enforcement activities on water and land, as well as covert operations, to ensure non-

compliance is detected and prosecuted. Without this, the recovery strategies will not be successful.

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