Operational Guidelines for the West Coast Charter Demersal Finfish Quota Tag System

2026-27 LICENSING PERIOD

Key points

- The tag system for demersal scalefish was implemented on 1 July 2023 as the primary measure to manage the West Coast charter sector to its annual demersal scalefish recovery benchmark**.**
- Due to continued sustainability issues in the West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource, the West Coast charter sector's recovery benchmark has been reduced from 30 tonnes to 25 tonnes for 2026-27.
- Charter operators are only able to fish for and retain demersal scalefish in the West Coast Zone if they have been allocated quota tags or have acquired quota tags from another charter operator that has been allocated tags.
- From 1 November 2026, every quota species kept must be tagged, including those kept for consumption on board as part of the tour (catch to cook).
- For the 2026-27 season, **7,225** tags have been allocated across the 33 Fishing Tour Operator Licence (FTOL) holders in the West Coast Zone based on catch history.
- Charter operators who do not have quota tags on board can continue to undertake tours targeting and retaining non-demersal species.

Operational guidelines explained

From 1 July 2026, all FTOL holders endorsed to fish in the West Coast Zone require quota tags to fish for and retain demersal scalefish.

Only Fishing Tour Operator Licence (FTOL) holders that have quota tags on board their charter boat can fish for and retain **ANY** demersal scalefish ashore in the West Coast Zone. All other relevant recreational fishing rules apply.

FTOL and Restricted Fishing Tour Licence (RFTOL) holders that are not in possession of quota tags can no longer retain demersal scalefish for the purpose of providing a meal for those on the boat (catch to cook). A tag must be used for each quota demersal species retained, including those retained for catch to cook.

The operational requirements of the quota tag system are explained further below. If you intend to fish for demersal scalefish in the West Coast Zone, please familiarise yourself with these guidelines.

The Quota Tag System – what is permitted?

The table below summarises what fishing activity is permitted depending on what licence you hold and whether or not you have quota tags on board your charter boat.

FISHING ACTIVITY	FTOL WITH TAGS	FTOL WITHOUT TAGS	RFTOL
RETAINING NON-DEMERSAL SPECIES FOR CATCH TO COOK			
RETAINING DEMERSAL SPECIES FOR CATCH TO COOK			
LANDING NON-DEMERSAL SPECIES			
LANDING DEMERSAL SPECIES			

The allocation decision and number of tags available

For the 2026-27 season, **7,225** quota tags have been allocated across the 33 eligible FTOL holders.

This was determined based on the 2025 calendar year data and is consistent with the *Notice of Amended Quota Tag Determination and Allocation Method (Fishing Tour Operator's Licence holders in the West Coast Region) 2026-27.*

The formula is outlined below:

$$\text{Number of quota tags} = \frac{A \times B \times C}{D}$$

Where in the 2026-27 calculation:

Variable	Definition	2025 value	Additional information
A	The estimated total fishing mortality of 'quota species' as a percentage of the estimated total fishing mortality of all top 15 demersal finfish species/groups.	0.89	This considers catch composition and accounts for the fact that tags are only used on quota species. In 2025, 89% of the charter total fishing mortality was of quota species.
B	The annual total allowable level of fishing mortality of the top 15 demersal finfish species/groups.	25,000 kg	Recovery benchmark.
C	The estimated retained fishing mortality of 'quota species' as a percentage of the estimated total fishing mortality (retained +PRM) of 'quota species'.	0.96	This considers that a small number of quota species will be discarded and die post-release. An estimated 96% of total fishing mortality of quota species is estimated to be retained, and 4% is estimated to be post-release mortality.
D	The estimated average retained weight of 'quota species.'	2.95 kg	

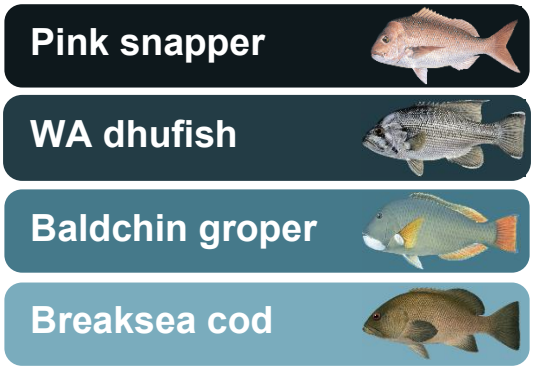
Note: some values have been rounded for simplicity in the table and may not add up to the whole.

Quota species

Quota tags are not species specific and to make the process simple and streamlined for charter operators, only the *relevant demersal finfish* aka 'quota species' need to be tagged once the decision has been made to retain them.

The four 'quota species' are: pink snapper, WA dhufish, baldchin groper and breaksea cod.

All other demersal scalefish species may retained without having to be tagged, provided the charter boat has tags on board.



Other fishing rules that apply

All recreational fishing rules apply, such as bag, size, and possession limits, and spawning closures. Licensed charter boats are only excepted from the recreational demersal scalefish effort closures and the demersal scalefish boat limit.

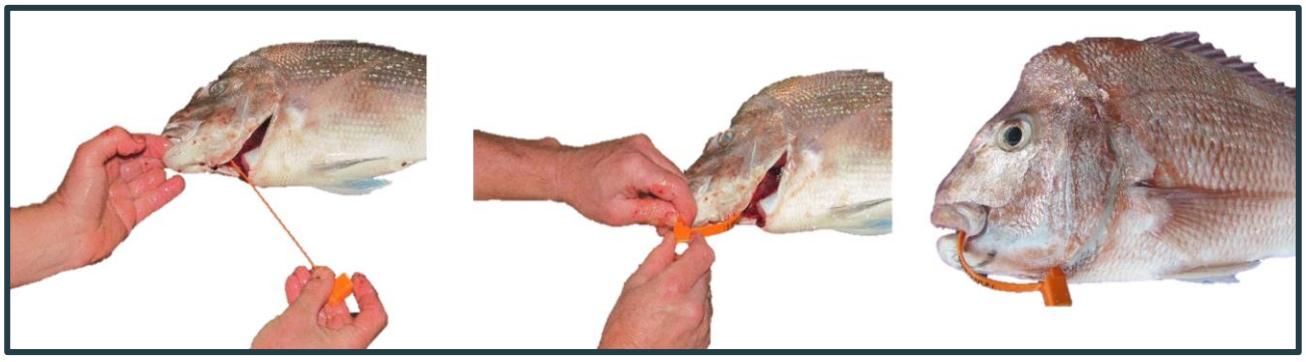
For more information, please refer to the current Recreational Fishing Guide.

2026-27 tags

Demersal scalefish quota tags have a secure, tamper-evident locking mechanism to ensure they cannot be re-used. Each tag is printed with details of the licensing period that they are valid for, as well as a unique serial number (refer to image below). For the 2026-27 season, the tags are red with white print; this colour will change on an annual basis.

Securing tags to quota species

The master of the charter boat is responsible for tagging all quota species that are retained, including those retained for consumption on board as part of the tour, within 15 minutes of the fish being brought on board. The tag must be attached through the mouth and gill slit (as shown). Should it be required for larger fish, securing the tag through the lip is also acceptable. To secure the tag, feed the end into the lock chamber and ensure it has clicked into place. These tags are tamper-evident and cannot be re-used.



Reporting tags

The master of the charter boat must record the serial number of every tag used and the details of the relevant quota species it was used on in a statutory return within 15 minutes of the fish being brought on board.

The 6-digit alphanumeric serial number must be recorded in the ‘Tag serial numbers’ section of the charter boat’s statutory logbook

For all retained quota species, including those taken for consumption on board the vessel as part of the tour, a serial number must be recorded.

Filleting requirements of quota species

If a retained quota species is to be filleted on board and landed ashore at a later time, a locked quota tag must be stored with the fillets. The tag must be locked and stored with the fillets, and the fish and tag details recorded in the statutory logbook, within 15 minutes of the fish being brought on board. Tags must not be cut and stored with the fillets. It is recommended that the tag not be attached to a whole fish if that fish is intended to be filleted prior to landing.

The fillets, along with the tag, must be stored in a separate container that does not contain any other fish. Two fillets equal one whole fish for the purpose of determining bag limits and tag usage.

If a retained quota species is to be consumed on board, the tag may only be removed immediately prior to preparation of this fish for immediate consumption.

Fishing without tags on board

Charter boats operating under an FTOL or an RFTOL must have quota tags on board to fish for demersal scalefish, and from 1 November 2026, this includes for the purpose of offering a meal for those on the boat.

FTOLs can also continue to fish for and retain non-demersal scalefish species in accordance with the relevant rules. This includes nearshore species (e.g., whiting and herring), large pelagic species (e.g., shark, mackerel and tuna), squid, cuttlefish, octopus, and western rock lobster.

Transferring tags

Quota tags may be privately temporarily transferred between FTOL holders regardless of whether a licence holder was originally allocated tags. It is the responsibility of the master of the charter boat to ensure the relevant tag numbers are recorded in the boat’s statutory logbook when used.

Frequently asked questions

How long will the demersal scalefish tag system be in place?

Current management arrangements for the West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource are in place to address severe sustainability risks to the resource. The use of a physical tag system as the primary measure to manage the charter sector's catch in the West Coast region will be reviewed and consideration may be given to transitioning to a digital reporting system in the future.

How long are quota tags valid for?

Quota tags are issued for use during each 12-month licensing period for the charter sector commencing on 1 July 2023. Tags issued for the 2026-27 licensing period are valid from 1 July 2026 to 30 June 2027. Unused tags will be forfeited and cannot be carried over into the next licensing period. Each year, the tags will be a different colour and serial numbers will change.

Do tags need to be sent back to DPIRD once fish is landed ashore?

Tags are not required to be sent to DPIRD once landed ashore. Fishers are encouraged to responsibly dispose of tags in an appropriate recycling bin.

How will tags be allocated in future licensing periods?

The tag system will be subject to an annual review process where any operational issues, industry feedback, and future allocation decisions will be considered. Catch and effort behavioural changes will also be assessed as part of this review process and may alter the number of tags available in following licencing periods to manage the sector to its recovery benchmark (now 25 tonnes).

Can demersal scalefish be eaten on board without using a tag?

No, from 1 November 2026, FTOL and RFTOL holders in the West Coast region must have unused tags on board to fish for and retain any demersal scalefish. Quota species of demersal scalefish that are to be retained for any purpose must be tagged and recorded in the statutory logbook when they are brought on board.

If a quota species is to be prepared for consumption on board as part of the tour, the tag may only be removed after the fish and tag details have been recorded in the statutory logbook and when the fish is being prepared for immediate consumption.

How do consumed demersal species need to be reported in logbooks?

The master of a charter boat is required to record all fish retained, including both those consumed on board and landed, in the relevant columns the logbook. There is now a statewide requirement for all operators to differentiate between landed and consumed fish.

Can non-quota species of demersal scalefish retained without being in possession of tags?

No, the master must be in possession of tags to retain ANY demersal scalefish.

What is the penalty for reusing tags or retaining a demersal scalefish without being in possession of tags?

The maximum penalty is $5,000.

When do retained quota species need to be tagged and recorded in the statutory logbook?

Quota species that are to be retained must be tagged and the tag and fish details recorded in the statutory logbook, within 15 minutes of the fish being brought on board the boat.

Will charter licence fees be reviewed?

The licence fee structure for FTOL and RFTOLs are currently being considered as part of the statewide strategic charter review.

Will there be a licence buy back?

There is currently no proposal for Government to buy back FTOLs or RFTOLs.

Where can I find more information?

If you have any questions regarding the tag system, please contact the charter management team by email at charter@dpird.wa.gov.au.

Important Disclaimer

The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development and the State of Western Australia accept no liability whatsoever by reason of negligence or otherwise arising from the use or release of this information or any part of it.

Copyright © State of Western Australia (Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development) 2026