

West Coast Demersal Scalefish Recovery Support Package: Voluntary Licence Buyback Project

On 6 December 2022, the Minister for Fisheries announced a \$10 million recovery support package to boost the recovery of the West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource (WCDSR).

Project description

A key initiative of the WCDSR recovery support package was the implementation of a Voluntary Fisheries Adjustment Scheme (VFAS) for the commercial sector to allow authorisation holders in the West Coast Demersal Scalefish Interim Managed Fishery (WCDSIMF) to receive compensation for the surrender of units of entitlement. The VFAS was administered in accordance with the *Fisheries Adjustment Schemes Act 1987*.

Project objectives

A targeted VFAS to buyout units of entitlement in the WCDSIMF to:

1. give effect to an 18.5 tonne commercial intra-sectoral reallocation of the commercial sector recovery benchmark from the WCDSIMF to the other commercial fisheries that access the WCDSR but primarily target other species; and
2. any additional take up to be put into the “fish bank” to assist recovery and may be considered for use in meeting future WCDSR objectives.



Project outcomes

The WCDSIMF VFAS resulted in the acceptance of 12 offers totalling 8,932 units of entitlement being surrendered, equating to 38.5 tonnes of demersal scalefish catch. This results in a revised recovery benchmark for the WCDSIMF of 180 tonnes (Table 1).

Table 1. Revised WCDSIMF recovery benchmarks per management area.

WCDSIMF Area	2022 WCDSR benchmark	No. Units	Notional WCDSR kg/unit	Units surrendered		WCDSIMF VFAS benchmark reduction	New WCDSIMF benchmark
				No.	%		
Kalbarri	75 t	10,490	7.15 kg/unit	1,349	13%	-9.75 t	65.25 t
Mid-West	87.5 t	24,278	3.6 kg/unit	7,397	30%	-26.75 t	60.75 t
South-West	56 t	5,071	11.05 kg/unit	186	4%	-2 t	54 t
WCDSIMF Total	218.5 t	39,839	-	8,932	22%	-38.5 t	180 t

The other commercial fisheries that access the WCDSR

There are several WA commercial fisheries that target other resources (including shark, rock lobster, octopus, squid, and scallop) but catch demersal scalefish as byproduct.

In February 2022, the Minister for Fisheries announced a 50% reduction to the recovery benchmark for these fisheries to 21.5 tonnes.

No management changes to reduce demersal scalefish catches were introduced for the other commercial fisheries in 2023, noting the objectives of the VFAS.

Revised recovery benchmarks for the commercial sector and recreational (including charter) sector

Following the outcomes of the VFAS, the Minister for Fisheries has approved:

1. an 18.5 tonne commercial intra-sectoral reallocation to the other commercial fisheries that access the WCDSR but primarily target other species.
2. 20 tonnes to be made available to the recreational (including charter) sector while in recovery, with 10 tonnes to the charter fishery and 10 tonnes to the recreational fishery.

This decision offsets the need for additional management for the other commercial fisheries that access the WCDSR. The re-allocation of 18.5 tonnes to these fisheries means they can continue to operate at current levels and not impact on the seafood supply of species such as shark to the WA community.

The new access arrangements for the recreational (including charter) sector will be reviewed once the resource has fully recovered.

The revised recovery benchmarks for the commercial sector and recreational (including charter) sector are outlined in Figure 1 and Table 2.

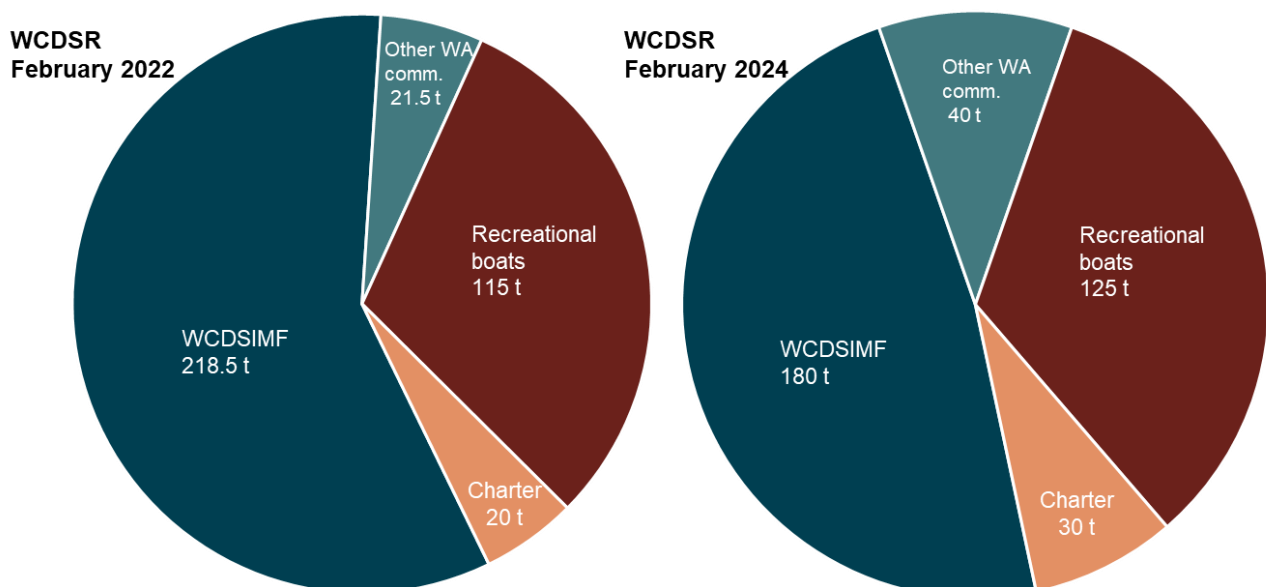


Figure 1. WCDSR recovery benchmarks set by the Minister for Fisheries in February 2022 and revised 2024 WCDSR recovery benchmarks.

Table 2. WCDSR 2022 recovery benchmark and revised 2024 recovery benchmark.

Sector	Fishery	2022 benchmark	2024 benchmark
Recreational sector	Private recreational boats	115 tonnes	125 tonnes
	Charter	20 tonnes	30 tonnes
	Recreational sector total	135 tonnes	155 tonnes
Commercial sector	WCDSIMF	218.5 tonnes	180 tonnes
	Other WA commercial	21.5 tonnes	40 tonnes
	Commercial sector total	240 tonnes	220 tonnes
WCDSR total		375 tonnes	375 tonnes

Revised species-specific recovery benchmarks

Changes to the species-specific recovery benchmarks are outlined for the commercial sector in Table 3 and the recreational (including charter) sector in Table 4.

Table 3. Revised commercial sector species recovery benchmarks.

Suite	Species	2022 benchmark	2024 benchmark
Inshore demersal	Baldchin groper	11 tonnes	9.5 tonnes
	Redfish sp.	21 tonnes	20.5 tonnes
	Breaksea cod	1.5 tonnes	1.5 tonnes
	Dhufish	45.5 tonnes	41.5 tonnes
	Pink snapper	69 tonnes	62.5 tonnes
	Emperors	51 tonnes	46.5 tonnes
Offshore demersal	Total offshore demersal suite of species	40 tonnes	37 tonnes

Table 4. Revised recreational (including charter) sector species recovery benchmarks.

Suite	Species	2022 benchmark	2024 benchmark
Inshore demersal	Baldchin groper	20 tonnes	21.5 tonnes
	Redfish sp.	3.5 tonnes	4 tonnes
	Breaksea cod	7.5 tonnes	7.5 tonnes
	Dhufish	68 tonnes	72 tonnes
	Pink snapper	17.5 tonnes	24 tonnes
	Emperors	5.5 tonnes	10 tonnes
Offshore demersal	Total offshore demersal suite of species	5 tonnes	8 tonnes

Next steps

In the first half of 2024, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) will:

- Undertake statutory consultation with WCDSIMF permit holders on capacity reductions that are reflective of the outcomes of the VFAS (Table 1).
- Undertake an annual and periodic review of the WCDSR to consider the outcomes of the 2024 stock assessment and assess if current management arrangements have reduced each fishery's total mortality to their revised recovery benchmark.
- Revise the *West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource Harvest Strategy 2021-2025* to incorporate the WCDSR recovery strategy and the outcomes of the VFAS.



Further information on the WCDSR is available on the DPIRD website at <https://www.fish.wa.gov.au/>

For enquiries, please contact wcdemersal@dpird.wa.gov.au.

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