



South Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource

Fisheries Science Update – September 2025



The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) monitors the status of Western Australia's demersal scalefish resources by undertaking regular stock assessments on indicator species.

This summary provides key outcomes of the 2024 assessment of the South Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource (*Fisheries Research Report No. 339*).

Status of indicator species

Bight redfish

High risk



Snapper

High risk



Western blue groper

High risk



Key points

- Overfishing has caused declines in Bight redfish, snapper and Western blue groper biomass to unacceptable levels.
- Bight redfish in the South Coast bioregion can live for up to 84 years, meaning they are highly vulnerable to overfishing and could take decades to recover if overfished.
- Management changes will be required to ensure there are fish for the future.

Snapshot South Coast Bight Redfish



Catch

Catch is dominated by the commercial line fishery which has landed between 12 and 48 t annually since the late 1980s.

Recreational catches have varied between 10 and 17 t since 2011-12, and annual charter catches have ranged from 2 to 8 t since 2001-02.

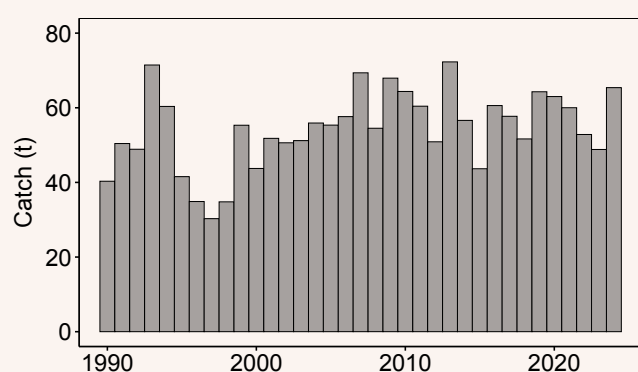


Figure 1 Retained catches of bight redfish by recreational, charter and commercial fishers in the South Coast bioregion up to 2024

Bight redfish are exceptionally long lived (up to 84 years) and females mature between 5-21 years (depending on the region).

Commercial discards of Bight redfish are minimal because most fish retained are greater than 30 cm.

Biomass

Fishing pressure has resulted in Bight redfish biomass in the South Coast bioregion falling below acceptable levels.

Relative biomass of female Bight redfish has depleted by 72% of unfished levels.

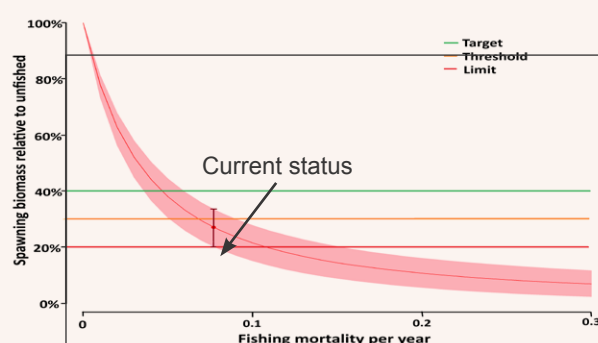
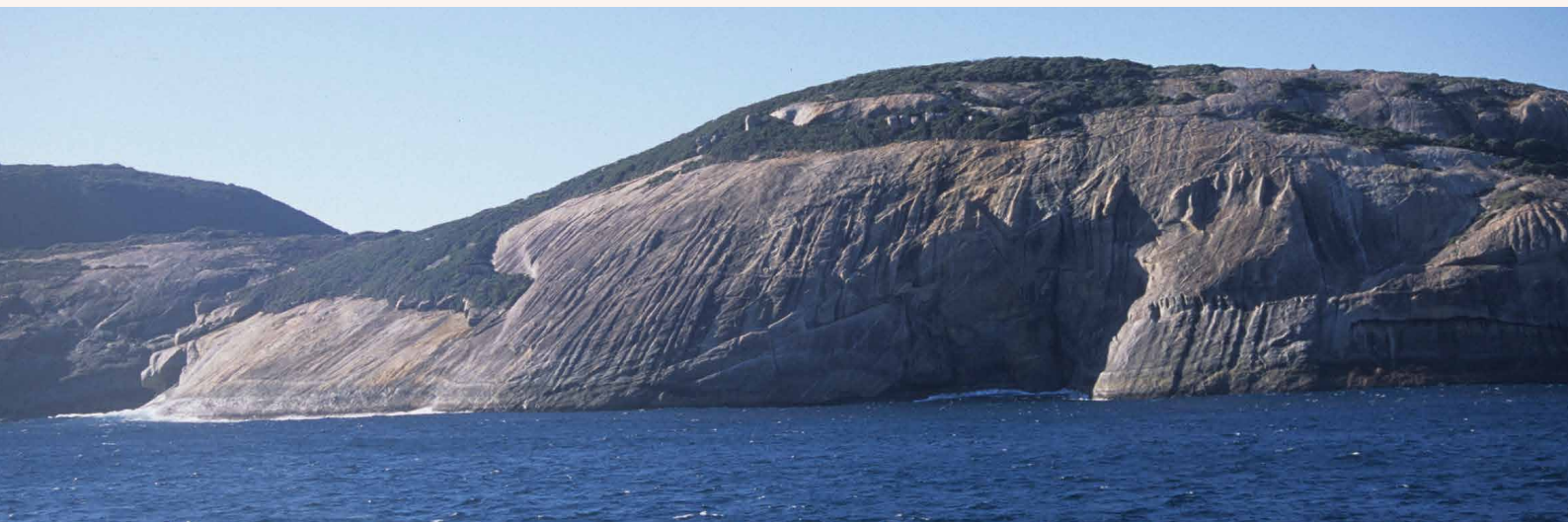


Figure 2 Relative spawning biomass of female Bight redfish in the South Coast bioregion at different levels of fishing pressure, compared to reference levels

Between 2012 and 2019, approximately 5-6% of fish aged were greater than 40 years old. In 2019, the proportion of fish between 20-39 years old decreased from 42% to 36%.



Snapshot South Coast Snapper



Catch

The commercial catch, dominated by the line fishery, has remained relatively stable since 2011, fluctuating between 30-40 t.

Recreational catches have varied between 5 and 12 t since 2011-12, and the annual charter catches have been <1 t since 2010.

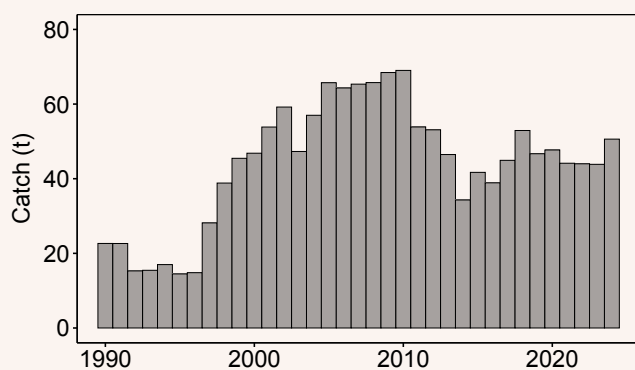


Figure 3 Retained catches of snapper by recreational, charter and commercial fishers in the South Coast bioregion up to 2024

Biomass

Fishing pressure has resulted in snapper biomass in the South Coast falling below acceptable levels.

Relative biomass of female snapper has depleted by 77% of unfished levels.

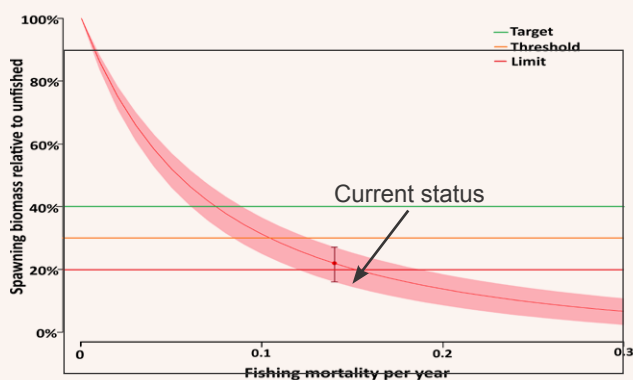


Figure 4 Relative spawning biomass of female snapper in the South Coast bioregion at different levels of fishing pressure, compared to reference levels

Snapper are found across the South Coast bioregion, but most catch occurs west of 120° E (near Hopetoun) where abundance appears to be higher.

Snapper use south coast estuaries as nursery areas. After being spawned in the ocean, they enter on flood tides, when they are only a few weeks old and around 1 cm long.

Snapper in the South Coast live up to 40 years and mature around 4-5 years. Between 2012 and 2019 approximately 26% of fish aged were between 10-20 years.



Snapshot South Coast Western Blue Groper

High risk



Catch

Most commercial catch is taken by the Southern Demersal Gillnet and Demersal Longline Managed Fishery.

Catches peaked at 41 t in 2008-09, but since 2014-15 they have declined to ~17 t in 2021-22. This is consistent with declining fishing effort in the South Coast bioregion.

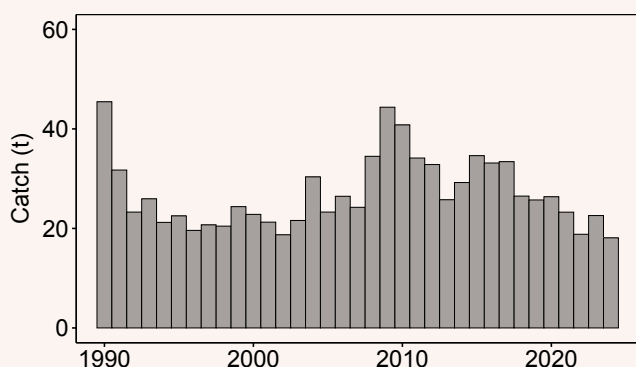


Figure 5 Retained catches of Western blue groper by recreational, charter and commercial fishers in the South Coast bioregion up to 2024

Western blue groper are protogynous hermaphrodites and change sex to male later in life. We monitor sustainability based on the male population, compared to females in most other demersal species.

Biomass

Fishing pressure on male Western blue groper has resulted in spawning biomass falling below acceptable levels.

Relative biomass of male Western blue groper has depleted by 76% of unfished levels.

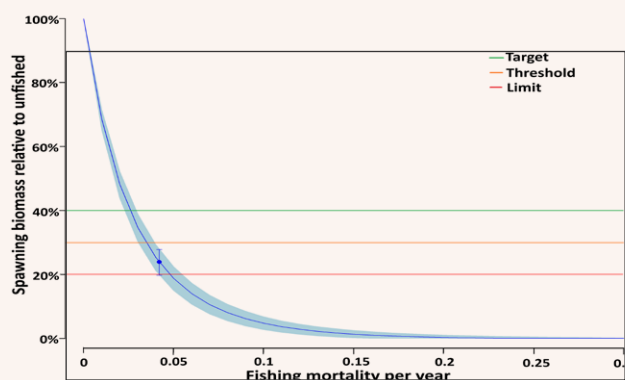


Figure 6 Relative spawning biomass of male Western blue groper in the South Coast bioregion at different levels of fishing pressure, compared to reference levels

Western blue groper can live up to 71 years. They mature late (~17 years) and change sex (from female to males) around 35 years old.

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