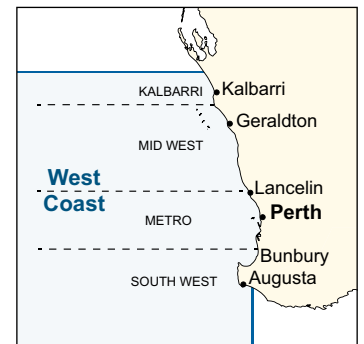




West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource Fisheries Science Update – September 2025



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 2025 assessment of the West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource (*Resource Assessment Report No. 2*).

Status of indicator species

WA dhufish

Severe risk



Snapper

Severe risk

(Northern)



Snapper

Severe risk

(Southern)



Key points

- The West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource has been in recovery since 2010.
- The latest science shows that management action taken in 2023 has not reduced total removals (retained catch + post-release mortality) to a sustainable level.
- Overfishing of WA dhufish and snapper is still occurring and is preventing their recovery, with stocks of both species remaining below limit reference levels.
- Spawning biomass of WA dhufish is 85% depleted, northern snapper is 83% depleted and southern snapper is 80% depleted.
- Sustained commercial and recreational high fishing pressure on these long-lived species (maximum life span around 40 years) has reduced the number of older breeding fish that are critical for replenishing the population.
- Significant management changes will be required to ensure there are fish for the future.

Snapshot West Coast WA Dhufish

Severe risk



Catch

The science indicates that WA dhufish catch benchmarks between 2010-2022 were set too high.

Management changes in 2023 have reduced total removals of WA dhufish by 20%, predominantly driven by significant reductions in post-release mortality (down 75%), but the latest science shows catch levels are still too high to allow recovery.

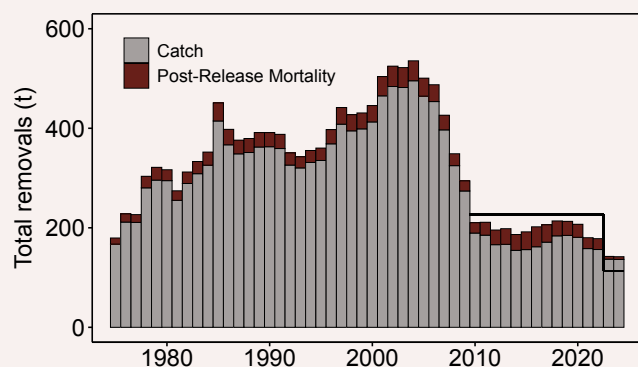


Figure 1 Total removals of WA dhufish by commercial, charter and recreational fishers in the West Coast bioregion up to 2024, relative to recovery benchmarks in place since 2010

In 2023-24, around 70% of WA dhufish catch in the West Coast bioregion was taken by recreational fishers.

Biomass

Biomass of WA dhufish has remained overfished for over 18 years and is not recovering.

Across the West Coast bioregion, spawning biomass of WA dhufish is depleted by 85% of unfished levels, with the highest depletion in metro waters.

The overfished WA dhufish stock has significantly reduced reproductive potential that is likely inhibiting recovery.

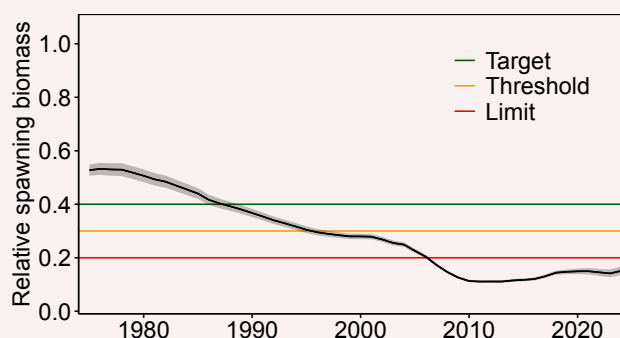


Figure 2 Spawning biomass of female WA dhufish in the West Coast bioregion compared to reference levels

Of the ~25,000 WA dhufish aged since 2002, only 9% have been older than 15 years and only 2% have been older than 20 years, despite this species having a maximum age of 40 years.



Snapshot Northern West Coast Snapper



Severe risk

Catch

Total removals of snapper in the Kalbarri and Mid-West area have fluctuated over time in response to variability in recruitment.

Total removals over the past 4 years have markedly exceeded recovery benchmarks for this stock, indicating overfishing of snapper is occurring and impacting recovery.

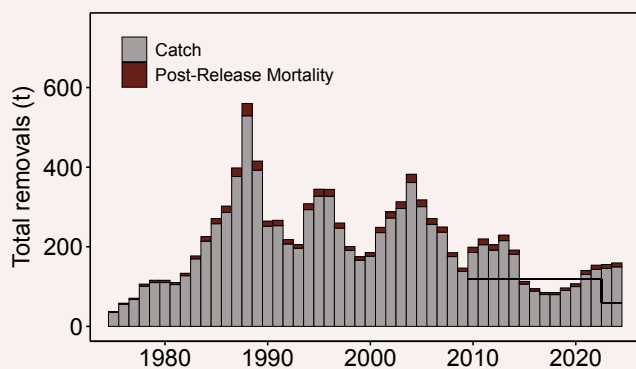


Figure 3 Total removals of snapper by commercial, charter and recreational fishers in the northern (Kalbarri and Mid-West areas) West Coast bioregion up to 2024, relative to recovery benchmarks in place since 2010

Snapper catches in the northern West Coast bioregion fluctuated widely over time due to decadal variability in recruitment, with recent catches dominated by year classes spawned between 2015 and 2017.

Biomass

Biomass of northern west coast snapper has remained overfished (below limit) for over 25 years in the Kalbarri and Mid West area.

Spawning biomass is depleted by 83% of unfished levels.

The overfished northern snapper stock has significantly reduced reproductive potential that is likely inhibiting recovery.

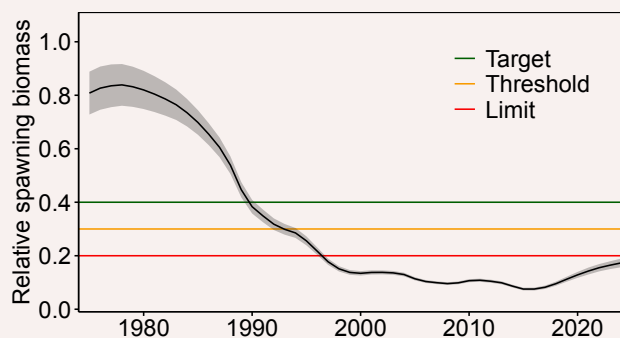


Figure 4 Spawning biomass of female snapper in the northern (Kalbarri and Mid West areas) West Coast bioregion compared to reference levels

In 2023-24, more than 85% of snapper catches in the northern West Coast bioregion were taken by the commercial fishing sector.

Over the last 20 years, only 4% of the ~20,000 snapper sampled in the northern West Coast bioregion have been older than 10 years.



Snapshot Southern West Coast Snapper



Severe risk

Catch

Total removals of snapper in the metropolitan and South West areas reduced markedly when management measures were introduced from 2007 to recover the stock, before gradually increasing.

Total removals over the past 7 years have markedly exceeded recovery benchmarks for this stock, with overfishing in the southern west coast impacting recovery.

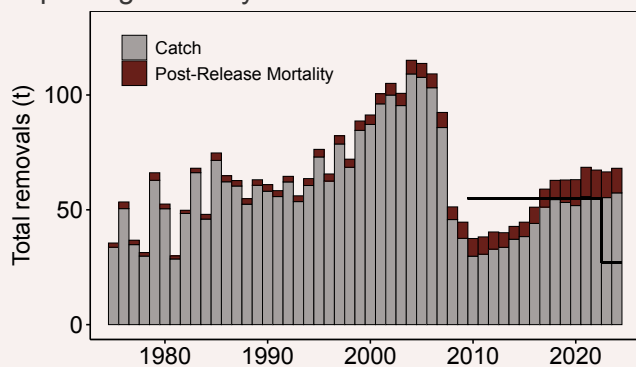


Figure 5 Total removals of snapper by commercial, charter and recreational fishers in the southern (Metropolitan and South West areas) West Coast bioregion up to 2024, relative to recovery benchmarks in place since 2010

In 2023-24, more than 70% of snapper catches in the southern West Coast bioregion were taken by recreational fishers.

Biomass

Biomass of southern west coast snapper is overfished.

Spawning biomass is depleted by 80% of unfished levels.

There have been some signs of recovery over the past 10 years, driven by good recruitment (numbers of juvenile fish entering the fishery). However, fishing pressure has remained too high on these limited years of good recruitment, slowing their recovery.

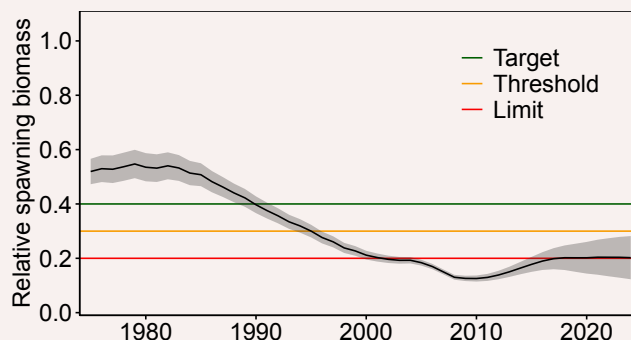


Figure 6 Spawning biomass of female snapper in the southern (Metropolitan and South West areas) West Coast bioregion compared to reference levels

Recent samples of snapper in the southern West Coast bioregion show high variability in recruitment between years, with greater relative numbers of fish belonging to year classes spawned in 1999, 2007, 2010 and 2015.

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