

DEMERSAL SCALEFISH

Statement by Minister for Fisheries

MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Fisheries) [2.07 pm]: I rise today to inform the house that the latest stock assessment undertaken by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development of demersal scalefish in the west coast bioregion, which is from Kalbarri to Augusta, has shown that we are not on track to recover stocks by 2030, as per the 2010–30 recovery plan. The recovery plan was set in motion by former Minister for Fisheries Hon Jon Ford and continued by Hon Norman Moore in response to serious sustainability concerns raised at the time. Current management arrangements and the responsible fishing practices of recreational anglers and commercial fishers have helped to halt the decline in demersal stocks, but there has been limited recovery of indicator species dhufish and pink snapper stocks. More needs to be done to safeguard their future.

In late 2021, a harvest strategy reference group comprised of Recfishwest, the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council, Marine Tourism Western Australia and DPIRD recommended to reduce the total catch for demersal species by 50 per cent in order to meet 2030 recovery targets. I have accepted this recommendation and in line with the principles of the harvest strategy and integrated fisheries management policy, the new recovery benchmark will be set at 375 tonnes, reduced from 750 tonnes. No new management changes have come into effect at this stage.

From this point, the department will work with the fishing sectors to develop management options to meet the new catch limit and additional measures to reduce fish mortality. All options are on the table for consideration and the state government welcomes any proposals from the sectors to assist with the implementation of the new total catch limits. Proposed management options developed through discussions with the sectors are due to be released for wider public consultation in April this year.

I am always proud of the research and science underpinning WA's world-class fisheries management and I want to thank DPIRD, WAFIC, Recfishwest and Marine Tourism WA for working collaboratively in the interests of the fishery. I want grandparents to be able to take their grandchildren fishing for decades to come. The science has made it clear that decisive management action needs to be taken or we risk a future without the demersal scalefish we value so highly as Western Australians.