

WEST COAST DEMERSAL SCALEFISH RESOURCE

49. Mr S.N. AUBREY to the Minister for Fisheries:

I refer to the Cook Labor government's commitment to the sustainability of Western Australia's fish stocks.

- (1) Can the minister advise the house how this government is taking action to protect demersal fisheries on our west coast while supporting the recreational, commercial and charter fishing sectors?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house if he is aware of any alternative proposals to protect this important fishery for future generations?

Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:

- (1)–(2) I certainly can. I thank the member for his question and interest in ocean science and environments, which I have to say is sadly lacking amongst the members of the National and Liberal Parties.

The west coast demersal resource is, of course, one of the most important fisheries to the fishing sector. It is very important to Western Australia and its sustainability is paramount. As members would be aware, in 2023, action was taken to secure the long-term sustainability of that resource and, importantly, ensure that we would have fish for the future. The Cook government supported those changes with an unprecedented \$10 million support package that provides a range of measures to assist the commercial, charter and recreational sectors. It is one of the most comprehensive packages.

As part of the package, a voluntary fisheries adjustment scheme for the west coast demersal line fishery was established. That package was particularly important to allow commercial licence holders to voluntarily sell entitlement to the scheme that could be used to offset the need to take management action on what we call the demersal gillnet and longline managed fishery. If we had had to take action against that fishery, then every fish and chip shop and restaurant would have been impacted. That is because those fisheries catch demersal fish as a by-product but primarily target other species. It would have become unviable if we had had to take management action against them.

I am very pleased to say that we successfully purchased 18.5 tonnes of entitlement required to safeguard that fishery for the future. Our fish and chip shops, and other resources such as restaurants, are safe and have access to that resource. Why did our government make that investment? It was to help make sure that we could support an important primary production sector and maintain local seafood supply.

I am very pleased to say that the commercial sector saw the need to sell an additional 20 tonnes of entitlement back to the state government through that process, and we have been able to use that to provide support and further assistance to the recreational and charter sectors. The government will use 10 tonnes to support recreational fishing, and that will be used, in conjunction with Recfishwest, to provide an extra two weeks over that very important September–October break. That will now stretch out the break to four weeks, something that has been incredibly well received by the recreational fishing sector. The new window will start on 16 September and close on 15 October each year, so members of the Liberal Party and Nationals WA should get their fishing rods ready. They might learn something. The charter sector will also receive an additional 10 tonnes on top of its current 20-tonne allocation. That will support a number of operators who will receive tags as an expansion, and also provide tags for those who have the strongest reliance on demersal fishing. An additional 12 licensees will receive tags, bringing the total number of recipients up to 33. This is a very welcome addition for the charter sector.

We have been able to make those changes using science and our experience to work through the options on a continuing basis, within the recovery benchmark total of 375 tonnes and without compromising our recovery strategy. That is what this government does. The reason we have to do this, of course, is to clean up the mess that was left to us in 2010, when the Liberal Party and Nationals WA forgot about the sustainability of the fishery and looked after their own skins just to appease some voters who thought that they could go out and fish whatever they liked. That is why we are in this position today. That is why we have had to make the hard decisions and why we, as an experienced government, can work through the issues and take them forward. That is why we will always do the right thing by WA and not just look after our own skins, as the Liberal–National government did and the opposition continues to do.

Mr M.J. Folkard interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Burns Beach, I think you like being called every day.

A member: At least he is consistent!

The SPEAKER: Yes, consistently naughty. The call for the last question is being given to the member for Cottesloe.