

WEST COAST DEMERSAL SCALEFISH RESOURCE

**551. Mr R.S. LOVE to the Minister for Fisheries:**

I refer to the minister's plan for the west coast demersal fishery, which includes an extended ban that will impact numerous businesses and communities along the coast.

- (1) Was the minister presented with a set of options for the future of this fishery, other than the two publicly announced shutdowns?
- (2) Did the government model the economic impact of shutting fishers out for three-quarters of the year; and, if not, why not?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH replied:**

- (1)–(2) This is not the first time that questions have been asked in this place about demersal fisheries. I want to go back to 2009 when a comment was made in this place. A member stated —

I have read some of the reports. Do we sit back and say, “Too hard. We’ll do nothing. We’ll let those species become, if not extinct, in such limited numbers and so rare that fishing will no longer be a major recreational and sporting activity in this state”?

That member also said —

... if things are left as they are, the ability of future generations to go out in a boat and catch demersal fish will not be there.

Who does the member for Moore think said that?

**Mr R.H. Cook:** Who said that?

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** Who do we think said that? It was Hon Colin Barnett, who was the Premier at the time. He was debating the then government's move to whack a huge tax on recreational fishing boats to try to dampen down demand—a huge tax. I am sure that a few members in here would remember that debate. Hon Jon Ford, who was Minister for Fisheries prior to the Barnett government coming to power, came up with a plan, part of which was a four-month seasonal closure. It turns out that an election was called shortly after that and members opposite campaigned—they did a bit of dog whistling—to bring on and attract the vote of recreational fishers by offering to soften those closure periods. What did that government do? It put a boat tax in place and halved the closure period to two months. Here we are in 2022 and once again we are having to clean up the mess that members opposite have left, because if that four-month closure period had been in place, we would not be in the position we are in today.

The government does not treat this issue lightly. We brought the recreational sector, commercial sector and marine charter boat industry sector onto the Harvest Strategy Reference Group to have a good look at this issue. They provided advice to me back in February 2022, and that advice was quite clear. The first recommendation was —

Following consideration of the science and the application of the harvest strategy control rules, a 50% reduction in the current recovery benchmark ...

It will go from 750 tonnes to 375 tonnes. In addition, some secondary measures were put forward. That recommendation was signed by none other than the CEO of Recfishwest, members of the commercial sector and all members of the Harvest Strategy Reference Group. I am happy to table this letter for the benefit of members opposite.

[See paper [1434](#).]

**Mr D.T. PUNCH:** This is a very significant issue. It is a tough issue. We have requested Recfishwest, the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council and the marine charter boat industry to come forward with recommendations on how we might implement a 50 per cent closure. Make no mistake, members: this will be a 50 per cent reduction in the mortality rate of demersal fish. That means that fewer fish will die. The easiest way to make sure that fish do not die is to not take them out of the water. That is what the industry is saying to us. That is what Recfishwest, WAFIC and the marine charter boat industry have said to me. It is quite clear.

We put in place a process for Recfishwest, WAFIC and the marine charter boat industry to look at options, and they have provided those options to us. All those options have been considered and are reflected in the proposals that have gone out from the department. This is despite all the rhetoric, particularly from the shadow spokesperson for fisheries, who has not even asked for a briefing on the science. This is such a critical issue for recreational fishers, yet members opposite are so lazy that they have not even asked for a briefing. No decision has been made at this point. All that has been put out are the proposals. The submission period will close on 30 September. I will then re-discuss the issue with WAFIC, Recfishwest and the marine charter boat industry to look at how we can address this issue. This issue can be traced directly back to the decision of the Barnett Liberal–National government to go weak in 2009 and soften the closure period. That has directly led to the situation now, in which we have had

marginal recovery of these important species. You go and talk to your tackle shops in your area and tell them what your party did, because this is around your neck!