

WEST COAST DEMERSAL SCALEFISH RESOURCE

Matter of Public Interest

THE DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S.J. Price) informed the Assembly that he was in receipt within the prescribed time of a letter from the Deputy Leader of the Opposition seeking to debate a matter of public interest.

[In compliance with standing orders, at least five members rose in their places.]

MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.22 pm]: I move —

That this house —

- (1) Recognises the irreplaceable economic, social and public health value fishing brings Western Australia and calls on the Minister for Fisheries to —
 - (a) review his policy to ban fishing for demersal scalefish, including pink snapper and black dhufish, for as much as nine months of the year; and
 - (b) develop a plan for the west coast fishery that balances community, economic and environmental outcomes.
- (2) Acknowledges the more than 18 000 Western Australians who have petitioned the minister to conduct such a review.

I bring this matter to the house because the Minister for Fisheries has demonstrated that he is not listening to the 17 885 petitioners who signed the e-petition lodged in the other place last week. I believe a subsequent petition on paper was lodged as well. A very large number of people have expressed concern about the way the minister has handled the situation because they know that the changes he is bringing to the fishery will have a devastating impact on Western Australians living up and down the coast.

I will read to the house the petition presented by Hon Colin de Grussa, the shadow Minister for Fisheries. He has done an excellent job communicating with Western Australians on this issue, which is something the minister has failed to do. He presented an e-petition containing 17 885 signatures, couched in the following terms —

To the President and Members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled. We the undersigned ...

are opposed to the proposal by Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) to ban demersal fishing for between 8 and 9 months a year and believe it does not align to the objects of fisheries legislation.

We therefore ask the Legislative Council to:

Review the proposal by the Department for Primary Industries and Regional Development to ban West Coast demersal fishing for between 8 and 9 months a year.

The recreational fishing industry contributes over \$2.4 billion dollars to the WA economy every year. Recreational fishing is a vital part of the WA lifestyle, with demersal fishing between Augusta and Kalbarri being very popular pastime amongst 1000s of West Australians. The proposed ban will not only affect the recreational fishing community it will also have a devastating flow on effect to many small businesses and families in both the metropolitan area and coastal regional towns, resulting in the loss of thousands of jobs and income.

And your petitioners as in duty bound, will ever pray

That is a very succinct outline of the problem. The minister is not listening to members of Parliament who have expressed their concerns. I brought a grievance to this place back in March, expressing concern about the potential effects that an inappropriate reaction of reducing the catch would have on communities. I highlighted in that grievance some of the concerns that my constituents and others have brought to me about the effects of the plan that is to be put in place. The minister has not listened since then—it was a long time ago now, back in March. He does not seem to be listening to my concerns or those of the small communities that are making their voices heard. Communities in my electorate from Guilderton up to Port Gregory will be affected by this change. I remember the effect of the original fishery closures on some of those smaller communities. They had a very severe effect on those communities, and they adjusted to that. But this closure to be inflicted on the communities that I and others in this place represent will have a much greater impact.

The minister is not listening to small businesses that are expressing concern. An article by Josh Zimmerman published in *The West Australian* of 15 September 2022 says —

Targeted recreational fishing bans lasting up to nine months of the year would torpedo WA's boating industry and drive dozens of businesses to the wall.

That is the view of Boating Industry Association WA president Sheryl Swarbrick, who has added her voice to the thousands calling for a re-think of the McGowan Government's proposed changes to the demersal fishing season.

A plan put forward by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development contains two options for demersal fishing—which includes prized species such as dhufish and pink snapper—in the west coast bioregion: a 94-day season in staged openings from December to May or a 123-day limit from April to October.

They are the concerns of small business. The minister also did not listen to the Western Australian Recreational Family Fishing Alliance when members had a meeting with him back in May and expressed their concerns. They outlined to the minister that the recreational sector contributes, as I said, \$2.4 billion to the local economy every year, and an allocation of 270 tonnes in the demersal scalefish fishery equates to \$8 888 a kilogram generated for each of those fish. They went on to say that this is a massive decision for the state government because there is a big audience and big ramifications for the economic and social fabric of our great state—mums, dads, kids, families, mental health, business, especially small business, and government revenue. The number of people and the wide range of businesses this will potentially affect is mind-blowing, right through to the devaluation of residential and commercial property.

This decision is not to be taken lightly. These are very serious matters and the minister needs to listen, but he has not. He is not listening to Recfishwest.

I will read the minister's statement to the house from the *Hansard* of Tuesday, 20 September 2022 —

I acknowledge that the proposed measures will have an impact on the recreational fishing experience, but the decision to accept the industry-led working group's recommendation to halve ... catch limits has not been made lightly.

That is true—the industry made that consideration—but what has not been considered is the manner in which it will be undertaken. The minister has not properly considered that matter. On the same day, he made a claim in this place. He said —

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.

That is not the case. The Recfishwest proposals have not been reflected in what the department has put out. I would say that is a false claim made by the minister. Prior to that, he said —

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 ...

That is not contested by Recfishwest, to my knowledge, or me. It goes on to say that the letter had been signed off on by —

... 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.

The minister tabled that letter, which I will look at in a moment. What exactly is this group? It is the group the minister put together called the West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource Harvest Strategy Reference Group. As the minister outlined, the group's membership includes representatives from the commercial sector, through WAFIC; the recreational sector, through Recfishwest; and members of the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. The letter was signed by a whole group of people. I think 12 signatures appear on it, although one is on behalf of someone else. The letter has been signed by members of those three groups. What the minister said was true. The letter states —

1. Following consideration of the science and the application of the harvest strategy control rules, a 50% reduction in the current recovery benchmark (750 tonnes) is required.

It went on to say —

2. In addition to Recommendation 1, investigate and prioritise the following measures to support recovery, reduce total fishing mortality and improve management and research of the resource:

- a) Support recovery:
 - i. Targeted protection for spawning activity;
 - ii. Stock enhancement opportunities;
 - iii. Consider regional or species-specific management options to achieve additional reductions in fishing mortality; and
 - iv. Management arrangements that provide adequate protection of recruitment pulses.
- b) Reduce total fishing mortality:
 - i. Increase education of post-release mortality;
 - ii. Investigate the extent of shark depredation and support mitigation measures where possible; and
 - iii. Management arrangements that reduce the need to release fish.

The minister and DPIRD have looked at that issue and come to a sensible arrangement insofar as reducing the need to release fish that have been dragged from the bottom of the ocean. When those fish come to the surface, their swim bladder is basically destroyed by the change in pressure and those fish do not survive. That is at least one sensible measure that the minister and the department have looked at. The letter goes on to say —

- c) Improve management and research of the resource:
 - i. Additional management, monitoring and compliance resources that facilitate annual performance reviews.
 - ii. There is a need for more real time catch data for all sectors.

I think that is supported by all groups. It continues —

- iii. Investigate the impact of climate change on key indicator species.
- iv. Consider how management arrangements can be designed to deliver social and economic outcomes.

That last proposal is the key point—consider how management arrangements can be designed to deliver social and economic outcomes. That implies that the minister is looking at more than just the science of how many fish there are in the ocean. Supposedly, he is also looking at the effect this will have on the communities that I and other members in this place represent, including, I might add, members who represent the metropolitan area, because a large number of fishers in the metropolitan area go out to the regions.

That is the whole point of the economic effect of this. The effect spreads right throughout the state and affects those very small communities. The outcome of that has not been looked at in the nuanced way that is required when making such an important decision. The minister has not been looking at all the social and economic impacts and has instead reverted to taking a sledgehammer approach. It is a very simple and cost-effective approach for the department in the way it has structured this closure arrangement. However, it has not looked at the more difficult matters of actually ensuring that the measures it is putting in place will not be overly detrimental to the communities that will be affected. The matters put forward in the harvest reference group's letter need urgent further investigation. Instead of treading wearily into this, this minister has blundered into what is a very costly and debilitating but cheap result that will decimate the economy of the communities that I represent and the businesses of all those people up and down the coast, including in the metropolitan area.

Recfishwest put forward other arrangements and sensible initiatives that the minister has not listened to. I ask the minister to go back and re-examine what Recfishwest suggested. It has put together an advice and recommendations paper on preferred management measures to inform phase 2 of the public consultation on the review of the west coast demersal scalefish fishery. It has put forward some very sensible measures. The minister needs to go back and re-examine this whole issue. No-one is saying that the science is incorrect or that the 50 per cent reduction does not need to happen. The issue is the way the minister has gone about it. He is ignoring the protection of all the stock through the spawning season. Only the recreational fishing people are proposed to be removed from the water at that point. A spawning fish is a spawning fish. It does not matter whether anyone is a commercial or recreational fisher; removing that fish has the same detrimental effect on the recruitment of stock going further. What alternatives have been put forward for recreational fishers to find other ways to hasten the uptake of stock? Recfishwest believes that what the minister has put forward is completely at odds with what he told Recfishwest earlier and with the proposals it had put in place.

As I said before, all the groups accept the science behind the total catch reduction from 750 tonnes to 375 tonnes, but we do not need or want to see a very damaging eight or nine-month ban for recreational fishers. We want an independent and transparent analysis of all the proposals by Recfishwest, including the resourcing requirements

for DPIRD; better resourcing for DPIRD to actively monitor the rec sector; the development of a catch-monitoring tool, app and website et cetera; and appropriate management applied for each region in the fishery, not just a blanket approach from way down south at Augusta to up past Kalbarri. The minister needs to be completely transparent and make public any economic modelling that he has done, because there was an agreement in that letter that an analysis of the economic effect would be done. If the minister has not done that modelling, he needs to do so urgently. He also needs to develop a transition or a compensation package before implementing these changes so that the industry and the communities that I and others in this chamber represent will not be so badly damaged by the measures that have been put in place.

The minister also needs to consider the impact of shark predation and other possible management options. I would urge him to rethink. I would urge him to take into account the sensible measures that entities like Recfishwest are putting forward. I would urge him not to say that he is just a believer in the science and that the government is doing this because if it did not make some changes, the fish would disappear. Everyone accepts the science; what is not accepted is the methodology that the minister will put in place. It will be damaging for communities. It will be damaging for the tens of thousands of families who like to go for a fish up or down the coast, and I support those regional communities. The minister is tearing at the fabric of Western Australian society. He needs to rethink and not be so lazy. He needs to go back and find a more nuanced and effective approach to achieve the 50 per cent reduction in fishing.

DR D.J. HONEY (Cottesloe — Leader of the Liberal Party) [3.40 pm]: I rise to support this important motion put forward by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. As we know, this proposal is a ban on recreational fishing for the demersal species for nine months of the year so the west coast fishery can rebuild stocks. I reinforce the point made by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition—that is, we accept the science. WA has been well blessed with excellent support in the department of fisheries, or whatever manifestation it is in. We have led the way since Hon Norman Moore followed the science and supported restrictions on lobster fishing. There is good science that should be used, and, of course, we have seen the tremendous outcome of the initiative that the Liberal government took, back in the day, despite considerable—I might say almost violent—opposition at the time. Therefore, let us make it clear: we support the science, and we appreciate it, but the good intention of supporting the science can get us only so far.

One of the things that we see with this government is it is very good at putting out public relations briefs. It is good at the spin of getting the message out, but it ignores the impact of what it is doing. We saw this recently, and today we heard an announcement on the forest industry. It is an outstanding industry that supports over 6 000 people, yet government members are shutting down the forest industry for their social media grabs so that they can appeal to people in the western suburbs of Perth—can I say probably mostly in my electorate—so that they get a feel-good factor when they turn up to their wine-tasting evenings. But that decision will, in fact, destroy what is probably the only genuinely sustainable industry in the state, and this decision is just as wrongheaded.

A responsible policy must consider the preservation of fishing stocks, but it must also balance other critical factors. It must minimise the economic impact on the shires, towns, recreational fishing groups, businesses and the broader economy. Unfortunately, this nine-month closure policy does not do that. Anyone who spends more than a minute looking at it will realise how wrongheaded it is for those towns that depend so critically on fishing, and there are many of those communities.

In terms of preserving fish stock, this decision will, in large part, simply achieve the outcome of pushing those fishers further north. I have been to Exmouth a number of times over the last little while and have spoken to community members there, and they are concerned that they will be flooded with fishers from the south who are coming north. Members will know that for the people who travel to those towns to fish, it is not an idle pastime; it is a passion, perhaps almost a religion for them. They will simply go north, so they will not catch fewer fish. This ban will displace one problem to another area, and I do not think that will solve the problem; in fact, I know it will cause problems north of Kalbarri.

We have seen reports in the media, which I will not go through in detail because we do not have time. This issue was covered by an ABC article on 11 September. Recfishwest did an excellent job of outlining all the various social and economic impacts that this decision will have. This is a heavy-handed nine-month ban, rather than taking a look at other ways that this can be done. Again, I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for going through that in some detail. It is clear that there has been a deficit of consultation in this process. Again, we see consultation occurring from offices, but we do not see meaningful consultation with the people who will be affected by this.

Honestly, if the minister or any of his staff walked into any of the businesses up and down the coast and said, “What do you think about a nine-month ban?”, he would not have got out of the place alive! But they would have told him just how incredibly damaging it would be for the coastal communities that depend on people. Yes, people go there because it is a beautiful recreational area, but the principal motivation is that people go there to fish. That is the activity that they have invested considerable amounts of money in. Many members know the considerable

amounts of money people spend on the equipment they use in their boats. If they cannot fish, they will not do that. They may go somewhere else. They may go overseas. But they go up our coastline to fish, and for the government to ban that for nine months of the year is unacceptable. We see the failure to consult in the enormous outcry—might I say, organic outcry—to this heavy-handed approach.

We saw that the minister had to extend the consultation period. But rather than extend the consultation period, I would say that the minister and his officers should go out and consult with people to understand the impact of this on the community. Credit to the minister and the government for making that decision, but this should have been done in the first place, before this announcement was made because, as I said, we have seen all that outrage. Again, instead of finding practical solutions and working with the industry, we get this one-size-fits-all approach instead of the potential to have a bespoke approach that suits the different areas. I thought it was callous of the minister when he came out and responded to the outrage over the fishing ban. As reported in *The West Australian* of 19 August, what was the minister's answer? Instead of saying, "Look, yes, I have good intentions here", the minister's three-word response was, "Take the pain." We accept that the minister has good intentions; there is no doubt, on this side, that he has good intentions. But he could have said, "Yes, I had good intentions, but perhaps I did not quite think about this."

Mr D.T. Punch: It was more than three words and it is paraphrasing Norman Moore who said the same thing in 2010.

Dr D.J. HONEY: Yes, minister, but you had a choice. You will have a chance to respond, minister. I am sure you will!

Mr D.T. Punch: I will, and I will enjoy it.

Dr D.J. HONEY: I am gleefully anticipating the minister's response. When I heard about this, it plunged me back to 2018 because many of us will remember when we saw what someone described as a "borderline socialist idea", which was the government taking over the increase in the crayfish catch. The crayfish industry is well managed, going back to Norman Moore's day, and the stock has gone up. What was the government's answer then? It was, yes, fishers can increase the catch, but only 315 tonnes will go to the commercial industry while 1 385 tonnes will be "quarantined" and later sold off by the state government for whatever purpose. It was utterly dumbfounding that the government would try to do that. It was another disastrous idea that was shot down. The Premier had to step in and order the minister to see some sense and come back with a proper plan. As I said, unfortunately, it appears that this minister is going down the same path.

If we look at the petition of 18 000 signatures, we can see that is not someone out there banging the drum. That is an organic massive response from the community of Western Australia to this issue, and it reflects the enormous impact that a ban will have on the industry and the communities. I congratulate the shadow Minister for Fisheries, Hon Colin de Grussa, for doing that and for giving people a voice in the Parliament as well. This is a massive industry for our state. The minister himself has said that recreational fishing is a \$2.4 billion-a-year industry. I am happy to stand corrected on this, but I think something like \$1.8 billion of that total impact on the economy comes out of the west coast fishery, so if we shut that fishery down for nine months, it will have an enormous impact on the total benefit to the community and the people of Western Australia, outside the recreational enjoyment people get from it.

It is no stretch of the imagination to say that the ban could, in fact, cause financial collapse and bankruptcy for many businesses that critically depend upon the fishing industry for 10 months of the year. I am fascinated, because the Deputy Leader of the Opposition asked the minister: where is the detailed economic modelling for this? What modelling was done to look at the impact on the many, many small businesses up and down the coast that critically depend upon fishing bringing people into the coastal communities and contributing to the overall tourism industries there? It would be quite clear to anyone looking at this that it would have an impact.

Let us look at the impact. There are 100 000 recreational boat owners in Western Australia, most of whom fish in the west coast fishery. Even if they spend only \$300 a year on maintenance, which I suspect would be a very small amount, that is \$30 million going into the local economy; nearly all of that spend would go into the local economy. We can go through other areas and look at fuel and whatever, but of course, it is all the other things. It is the fishing shops and all of those businesses.

There are also all the associated tourism businesses up and down the coast. In respect of the two-month ban, a business owner in Jurien Bay, Shane Younger, is the owner of Sea Sports and Tackle. He describes those two months as the worst two months of the year because he has to struggle through, carrying all the costs of his business for that two-month period. Fortunately, he has 10 months to make it up, but imagine doing that for nine months. As I say, those small family businesses would, in all likelihood, fold because of the dramatic decline in the number of people who are visiting the area.

We see a lot of this from the Labor Party. We see a lot of ministers at soirees and swanky events, whether it is \$1 000-a-bottle wine-tastings or whatever; most of us cannot do that. Most ordinary people cannot do that. The simple

pleasure they get in life is a couple of weeks with their family or their mates, along the coast, catching fish. This is a wrongheaded approach, and I think the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has provided some excellent solutions.

MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Fisheries) [3.52 pm]: I would like to begin with a quote from Recfishwest from a few days ago —

We are at the table with the Government. They have been true to their word to date and consultation is continuing. Our recent meetings have been constructive.

A decision is yet to be made and looking into the weeks ahead, we hope the Government announce a better package.

It is an interesting issue, this one. I also want to quote someone I think is a very sensible person in the other place, Hon Dr Steve Thomas. On 10 August, Hon Dr Steve Thomas went through the complexities of how we manage fisheries in WA. I think he referred to me as the “Minister for Killjoy”, or ministers for fisheries generically as “Ministers for Killjoy”, because of the difficult decisions they are invariably faced with. In his summary, Hon Dr Steve Thomas said —

All that needs to be gone through in detail.

That is fair enough. He continued —

The government and the Minister for Fisheries understand that, and it is not going to be an easy process to fix.

The fisheries sector is really incredibly important to Western Australia. I acknowledge both recreational fishers and commercial fishers because it is so personal to them. Many of the commercial fishing people I have met have grown up in a family industry. It is incredibly personal to them. Recreational fishers are incredibly passionate about the whole fishery; they are passionate, and I have heard a variety of views. They are passionate about going out and enjoying the experience of catching fish. They are also passionate about understanding the fishery and the issues associated with sustainability. Many fishers recognise the importance of fishing for the future, and those are the difficult parameters we have to deal with on a coastline where we have a growing population and where there is growing pressure, both commercially and recreationally, on the fisheries. I am not the first fisheries minister to stand here and be faced with the dilemma of how we balance sustainability with people’s enjoyment. That is what Hon Dr Steve Thomas is talking about. This is about balancing sustainability and people’s access, whether it is on the commercial side or on the recreational side.

Before the member for Cottesloe leaves—because no doubt he will—it would be really interesting to understand how many members who have talked about being committed to the science have taken up the option of having a briefing on the science. Have any members opposite had the briefing? I certainly know the shadow minister has not had a briefing, so to stand here and talk to me about accepting the science —

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The member is accepting the science at face value.

Mr R.S. Love: I have read the report you put out, minister.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The member accepts the tabled report, yet he sits there and, on such an important issue to his communities, has not taken the time to have a briefing with the officers and the scientists who have undertaken the stock assessment and put together the science that underpins this whole issue.

Mr R.S. Love: My experience of asking for briefings from your government is that I haven’t been successful.

Ms S.F. McGurk: He didn’t interject on you!

Mr R.S. Love: He’s asked me a question.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I did not ask for a follow-on comment, because the reality is that he has not —

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Deputy Leader of the Opposition!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The member talks about me being lazy, yet he and the shadow minister in the other place—and the members opposite, I hazard to guess, because no-one has contacted my office—have not requested a briefing on such an important issue to all the recreational fishers and to the 18 000 people who signed the petition. The member has not taken the time to be briefed on the issues and to understand them and play his part in contributing to the sustainability of the fishery. This is an opposition —

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Deputy Leader of the Opposition!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: This is an opposition that picks up a newspaper —

Mr R.S. Love interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Deputy Leader of the Opposition! You had your say earlier on. This is the minister's chance to respond. Do not keep interjecting on him. Carry on, minister.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: This is an opposition that grabs lines from the media or wherever, cobbles them together and engages in creating stress and anxiety amongst the wider fishing community, both recreational and commercial.

I want to come back to that comment about pain, because this is so typical of the member for Cottesloe. He also does it on his social media, and he does it with all the ministers. He just grabs a few words and then spouts them out of context. The actual comment I made was in response to Gareth Parker and the fact that the recreational sector and the commercial sector are having to look at how to take a 50 per cent reduction on the recovery benchmarks. That is pretty significant, and what I said was that they are both having to take the pain because this is a tough one. I did not just say "take the pain"; they are both having to take the pain. This is a tough one. What did Hon Norman Moore say? In 2009, Hon Norman Moore said on 6PR—the same radio station—that he would have to spread the pain across the system. That is the reality of this fishery.

Dr D.J. Honey: That's a very different statement.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: No, it is not. It is the same issue: spreading what is painful. We know this is tough. That is the challenge of government, and the member does not seem to understand that. The challenge of government is that we are presented with information and we have to make decisions. The challenge is engaging effectively to inform those decisions and to make sure that they are rational and based on evidence. That is what this whole process was about. The member just grabs at headlines and makes comments to stir people up, rather than helping to educate and inform on the challenge that we all face, because this is a challenge for all of us. When we say we are collectively going to take a 50 per cent reduction, that means that there will be an impact, no matter how we dress that up. A 50 per cent reduction in fish mortality means fewer fish are taken out of the water. It also means less fishing in some shape or form. That has a direct impact on the financial sustainability of commercial fishers and the tackle shop businesses that the member for Moore mentioned.

I very patiently listened to the member for Moore talking about the recreational fishing sector but I did not hear a word about the commercial sector and its importance to Western Australia. The commercial sector supplies local fish to fish and chip shops, local restaurants and hotels so that people who may not be able to go out and fish for themselves can enjoy our local fish. All of that west coast demersal catch goes into the local market. I have heard things out there in the media suggesting that that catch is exported—that it goes over east or to Europe or wherever. Not once have I seen an opposition member stand up and discount that. That is probably because they have not been briefed. Have they heard from the commercial sector?

Several members interjected.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Members!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That sector is certainly supporting where we have got to so far.

I want to make it absolutely clear that whatever we do is based on sustainability. No decision has been made yet. I want to take members through the issue because they have not been briefed. In my view, it is important that they understand the issue. If members do not know, the demersal scalefish resource is the suite of bottom-dwelling fish species, of which there are about 100 different species. We have a number of what we call indicator fish, which is pink snapper, dhufish and baldchin groper. They give us an indication of how the whole fishery is performing. They are all found within the west coast bioregion, stretching from Kalbarri to Augusta.

Back in the late 1990s and 2000s, a significant amount of overfishing occurred. That led to a series of protective measures being put in place by Hon Jon Ford, including the closure of commercial fishing in the metropolitan area between Lancelin and Mandurah. Members know that, but I have seen a heap of social media and heard commentary that the opposition has been involved in, but it has not bothered to correct, outlining the fact that people think commercial fishing is happening right up and down the coast.

Dr D.J. Honey: We're not going to respond to everyone who puts a post on fishing, for goodness sake!

Mr D.T. PUNCH: The member listened to them because he has quoted them back to me. All the time, he takes what he wants but he is not actually interested in understanding the importance of this issue and the importance of the decision to both recreational fishers and commercial fishers.

A 20-year recovery framework was set up. The critical issue with this species of fish is that we know that it is at dangerously low levels because the older the fish in a population, the more eggs they produce. They are the major

breeders. The major breeding does not necessarily occur in a single spawning event annually, at the turn of the moon or whenever; it combines with appropriate temperatures and currents in a series of environmental factors that provides these major spawning pulses. We have not had a decent spawning pulse for a number of years. We are finding that the older breeding fish are disappearing from the population. Although people are still catching a lot of fish, the fish they are generally catching—this is confirmed by the fish frame data that comes back to us—is younger than 10 years of age. We have lost that older demographic that is the major breeding capability of the resource. The more pressure we put on that younger demographic, the more we will be at risk of a sudden decline in the fishery in the out years.

That is what we are trying to address; we are trying to get the balance right demographically in that population of fish to make sure that we have the capability for high-capacity breeding when those environmental pulses come through. As members opposite have confirmed to me, that science has been accepted by Recfishwest, the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council, marine tourism and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development. They were jointly part of the harvest strategy reference group. This government does not just sit around and make decisions; we base our decisions on our engagement and consultation with people. The harvest strategy reference group is part of the governance of this fishery. It is critically important. It reviewed the science and came back with the 50 per cent cut.

During the discussion, the opposition mentioned that in making those recommendations, we have ignored all the proposals on the second page. Nothing is further from the truth. The proposals that were put out by the department included not only fish closures, but also a number of secondary measures. The reality is that all of the framework that came back out of Recfishwest was embraced by DPIRD and looked at in the final proposals that went out for public consultation. When the recommendation to reduce the amount of fish mortality by 50 per cent down to 375 tonnes came to me, WAFIC agreed to work with its members on the best strategy to address it. Recfishwest agreed to do the same. I thank Recfishwest for doing that and for engaging with the 6 000 fishers who completed the survey. I acknowledge that. The charter boat industry did the same.

All that information came back to the department. It looked at that information and ran a ruler over it to assess the impact that all those proposals and measures would have on reducing fish mortality. What contribution would each measure likely make to the reduction of fish mortality? That figure was not just plucked out of the air; it is actually science based. I want to acknowledge the marine scientists in the department who are often criticised by people outside the department for the fantastic work they do because their work has contributed to our fisheries being recognised worldwide as some of the most sustainable fisheries. All that work took place and proposals were put out for public comment. Yes, we extended the public comment period because it was clear that people were pretty passionate about this. I acknowledge the contributions that Recfishwest made through its submissions process. I also acknowledge the people who put submissions into our survey on the DPIRD website. All that information from the surveys is contributing to those ongoing discussions that we are having with both WAFIC and Recfishwest that I alluded to at the beginning of my speech.

This is a critically important issue for the Western Australian fishing community, whether one is a recfisher or a commercial fisher. I have asked both sides of the equation to acknowledge integrated fisheries management. One of the questions being asked—this is an important issue—is how we make that 50 per cent cut. One of the arguments is to simply take it out of the commercial sector as it is just fishing for itself. That is the sort of rhetoric that is out there that I have not heard the opposition correct.

Dr D.J. Honey: No-one on this side said that.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: That is the rhetoric that is out there. I have not heard the member publicly correct it. In fact, I have seen some suggestions—I think it was in an opinion piece from the member for Vasse, but I stand to be corrected—that we should look at the commercial sector. That is the fish and chip shops.

Dr D.J. Honey: We haven't suggested that.

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I am happy to be corrected. I am just going off memory. They are the fish and chip shops. They are the people who cannot fish for themselves. They provide a valuable service. Getting this balance right is incredibly important in the fisheries role. We are juggling a dynamic. It is about sustainability and the importance of having a viable commercial fishery. The demersal component of that fishery is often seen in conjunction with other parts of the fishery, whether it be the shark fishery or other fisheries. It is an important part of commercial viability. It enables local people in Western Australia to access fish.

I was very interested in a *Landline* report, which I thought was very balanced. I do not know whether any members opposite saw it. It interviewed Jessie Jackson from one of Geraldton's busiest fish and chip shops, who stated —

Every time we have our fresh local fish on sale, mostly on Fridays and Saturdays or over the weekend, we sell out within half an hour of opening shop. It's crazy. There's such a demand for fresh local fish,

especially with your groper and your dhufish. The cuts are going to really affect our business structure. I am very concerned.

I am concerned as well. Do not think that I do this just for fun. I am concerned. We do it because there is science that says that if we do not act, we will have a problem over the next few years that might lead to closure of the fishery. That scenario happened in South Australia. I do not want to do that. I want to support our fish and chip shops and our tackle industries. I want to find a pathway that maintains access for people who really enjoy just going out and dropping in a line and having the experience of catching a dhufish. I recognise the importance of that, but I also recognise the importance of spreading the load. If we load all those economic and social requirements on a species that is in recovery, everybody carries risk. We have to share the load with other species. We have to encourage anglers to enjoy the challenge of fishing for fish like Spanish mackerel and pelagic species and to enjoy going after herring or whiting. I know that is a different experience, but we need to look at spreading the load. We also need to look at how we can promote inland fishing and the opportunity there so that we can maximise a diverse product range for tackle shops and a diverse range of opportunities for commercial fishers. I clearly will not support this motion.

Amendment to Motion

Mr D.T. PUNCH: I move —

To delete all words after “house” and insert —

recognises the importance of sustainable fisheries management to Western Australia for present and future generations and acknowledges the work of the McGowan government in collaborating with peak fishing sector bodies to safeguard the future of demersal scalefish species in the west coast bioregion.

We will continue to work hard to support the recreational and commercial sectors in an environment that is tough. I acknowledge that it is tough. We will continue to work hard right until the end, until we find a pathway forward.

MR D.A.E. SCAIFE (Cockburn) [4.12 pm]: I listened with interest to the contributions made by the members for Moore and Cottesloe and I thought their contributions were quite revealing, although I suspect not in the sense that those members wanted them to be. What I thought was really revealing in their contributions was that their hearts are not in it on this issue. The performance of those members was completely lifeless—as lifeless as our fisheries would be if this opposition was in charge of them. It was absolutely rubbish stuff from the opposition. I would say to recreational fishers that these are not the people they want on their team. These are not the people they want championing their cause because it is quite clear they do not really care. They are just going through the motions because, cynically, they think there are some votes in it for them, but they did not have anything of substance to say. The members for Moore and Cottesloe said that they accept the science, but I did not hear them say today and have not heard them say before what the alternative proposition is. They have never put forward an alternative policy or proposal. I think it was the Leader of the Opposition who bizarrely said a while ago that the opposition did not need to have policies because it was not in government, and that seems to be the approach taken on this issue.

Ms M.J. Davies: Do not misrepresent me in this place; I have never said that.

Mr D.A.E. SCAIFE: The Leader of the Opposition said that in question time only a couple of months ago.

It is so outrageous that this opposition does not put forward its position to the public. It does not because it knows that the science presents a challenge. Members opposite know that our fisheries require very careful management and tough decisions have to be made. This minister is going through the process to make sure that those tough decisions can be made in the future. I want to stress that no decisions have been made. What the government has done, in a very orthodox manner, is set out options for policy change. It has set out options and put them up for consultation. Not only has it gone through the consultation process, but also, this minister, in response to the feedback that he received, extended the consultation period because he is very interested, as he said, in preserving our fisheries for future generations and preserving the livelihoods of people whose small businesses are reliant on our fisheries, including fish and chip shops and tackle shops. He is also interested in ensuring that people who fish for recreation are able to do so. That means some tough decisions have to be made, but those decisions have not yet been made.

We are going through the process of consultation and I know that the minister has been taking on board all the feedback he has received. Members of the government, like me, have been doing their bit as well. I had members of the Cockburn Power Boats club in my office just last week talking to me about this issue. I am sure that the members for Geraldton and Dawesville are doing exactly the same. We have been meeting with our local constituent groups and talking to them about the issues and talking through the policies. We have been relaying that feedback to the minister, as appropriate. We, and the minister, have always said that this government will fully consider the feedback that comes through the consultation process. I know that the minister is doing that. He is not just going through that process, but also constantly talking to peak bodies, whether it is Recfishwest or the Western Australian

Fishing Industry Council. He is speaking to those bodies on a constant basis to make sure that he is in touch with the views of their members. That is the hard work of government, compared with the absolutely lifeless efforts from the opposition, which gave no alternative policy and made no real criticism of the government's position because it knows that tough decisions need to be made.

The opposition is opportunistically trying to jump on an issue without bringing any substance to it. I thought that that was particularly shown up in the contribution made by the member for Cottesloe when he referred to the actions of Hon Norman Moore, but, conveniently, the member for Cottesloe left out that the reforms in demersal fisheries were actually started by Hon Jon Ford, the previous Minister for Fisheries. In fact, if I were the member for Cottesloe, I would be very careful talking about the policy work that was done by Hon Norman Moore because the initial stages of that policy work did not cover him in glory. I am going to step through that history because it shows that, yet again on this issue, the opposition has no credibility. Opposition members should not come to this place on issues with which they have no credibility. They have no credibility because it was not Hon Norman Moore who introduced the first raft of reforms. The previous Labor government, the Carpenter Labor government when Hon Jon Ford was fisheries minister, started the important job of reform of our demersal fisheries. In September 2007, Hon Jon Ford closed the metropolitan commercial fishery. He followed that up the next year, in June 2008, with an announcement of the closure of the recreational fishing season from 15 October to 25 December that year, and that in the following years, there would be a 3.5-month closure over that period.

I worked for Hon Jon Ford at that time and I remember the response from some members of the community. I agree with the member for Cottesloe that some of the responses from members of the community were not helpful. Some of them were quite violent or aggressive. Hon Norman Moore went through that as well. What we saw in response to those really tough decisions made by the Carpenter government was, again, complete opportunism by the then Liberal-National opposition, which was to announce a policy in the lead-up to the state election that was against the bans. I have the policy here. The policy states —

Recreational Fishing

The seasonal recreational fishing bans introduced by Labor on 24 June 2008 are extremely restrictive.

There is no question that it is important for the environment and for the commercial and recreational fishing industries that Western Australia's fish stocks are well managed into the future. The problem with Labor's recreational fishing ban, however, is that it was implemented without regard to the lifestyle of WA's boaters and anglers and without considering the damaging economic impact it will have on the associated boating, tackle and accommodation industries.

A Liberal Government will immediately establish an expert recreational fishing panel to review the Labor Government's ban and evaluate the environmental, social and economic impact of the restrictions, with a view to relaxing the bans.

The policy the Liberal Party took to the 2008 election was that it would go through a process of establishing an expert panel and that it would listen to that expert panel, but it also said in that policy that it had already decided the outcome it wanted, which was to relax the bans. That was not a genuine process of interrogating the science and listening to the experts. That was not a genuine process of consultation. The Liberal Party announced the establishment of an expert panel after having already decided the outcome it wanted, which was to relax the bans. Embarrassingly for Hon Norman Moore, of course, was that he did establish the expert panel, but when it reported back, it agreed with the departmental advice that had been given to Hon Jon Ford that justified the announcements in the first place. I know that because it was included in a press release by Hon Norman Moore on 2 July 2009, when he said —

“The independent reviews that I commissioned on becoming Minister for Fisheries have confirmed departmental advice that stocks of popular demersal species, such as dhufish, pink snapper and baldchin groper, are over-fished,” ...

The Liberal government established an expert panel hoping for a particular outcome but did not get it. It turned out that the advice the previous government had acted on was correct. The problem was that Hon Norman Moore had already cancelled the bans for that season, so we lost a season's worth of bans and failed to protect the resource for that season. In response, Hon Norman Moore had to re-announce a ban. He announced a watered-down two-month ban, and he also announced—this is the bit the Liberal Party does not want to be reminded of—a \$150 annual tax on fishers of demersal species. That is what that Liberal government did. The proposal of the then Liberal government was to tax fishers an extra \$150 each year to fish demersal species. Two months later, of course, that was changed and the tax was dropped. The Liberal government introduced bag limits but kept the two-month ban. The Liberal Party has just been flipping and flopping over the course of this issue, which is particularly apposite to a debate about fisheries. The Liberal Party did not have a consistent position in government, the positions it took were not based on science, and it did not do the work in terms of consultation. It was eventually led back around to the position of the

Mr Shane Love; Dr David Honey; Mr Donald Punch; Mr David Scaife; Acting Speaker

Labor government, but the reality is that if it had left in place the reforms that had been introduced by Hon Jon Ford, there is a very good chance we would not be in the position we are in today.

The ACTING SPEAKER: The question is that the words to be deleted be deleted. All those in favour say “aye”.

Point of Order

Mr R.S. LOVE: Was an amendment moved? I must have missed it. A piece of paper was circulated but was it actually moved?

Mr D.T. Punch: I moved it.

The ACTING SPEAKER (Ms C.M. Collins): Member for Moore, the minister moved the amendment.

Debate Resumed

The ACTING SPEAKER: The question is that the words to be deleted be deleted.

Division

Amendment (deletion of words) put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms C.M. Collins) casting her vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (43)

Mr S.N. Aubrey	Ms M.J. Hammat	Mr S.A. Millman	Mr D.A.E. Scaife
Mr G. Baker	Mr T.J. Healy	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Ms J.J. Shaw
Ms H.M. Beazley	Mr W.J. Johnston	Ms L.A. Munday	Ms R.S. Stephens
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr H.T. Jones	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr P. Papalia	Dr K. Stratton
Ms C.M. Collins	Ms E.J. Kelsbie	Mr S.J. Price	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr R.H. Cook	Dr J. Krishnan	Mr D.T. Punch	Mr P.C. Tinley
Ms L. Dalton	Mr M. McGowan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Ms C.M. Tonkin
Mr M.J. Folkard	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr R.R. Whitby
Ms K.E. Giddens	Mr D.R. Michael	Ms R. Saffioti	Ms C.M. Rowe (<i>Teller</i>)
Ms E.L. Hamilton	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Ms A. Sanderson	

Noes (6)

Ms M. Beard	Dr D.J. Honey	Ms L. Mettam
Ms M.J. Davies	Mr R.S. Love	Mr P.J. Rundle (<i>Teller</i>)

Amendment thus passed.

Amendment (insertion of words) put and passed.

Motion, as Amended

The ACTING SPEAKER: The question is now that the motion, as amended, be agreed to.

Division

Question put and a division taken, the Acting Speaker (Ms C.M. Collins) casting her vote with the ayes, with the following result —

Ayes (43)

Mr S.N. Aubrey	Ms M.J. Hammat	Mr S.A. Millman	Mr D.A.E. Scaife
Mr G. Baker	Mr T.J. Healy	Mr Y. Mubarakai	Ms J.J. Shaw
Ms H.M. Beazley	Mr W.J. Johnston	Ms L.A. Munday	Ms R.S. Stephens
Dr A.D. Buti	Mr H.T. Jones	Mrs L.M. O'Malley	Mrs J.M.C. Stojkovski
Mr J.N. Carey	Mr D.J. Kelly	Mr P. Papalia	Dr K. Stratton
Ms C.M. Collins	Ms E.J. Kelsbie	Mr S.J. Price	Mr C.J. Tallentire
Mr R.H. Cook	Dr J. Krishnan	Mr D.T. Punch	Mr P.C. Tinley
Ms L. Dalton	Mr M. McGowan	Mr J.R. Quigley	Ms C.M. Tonkin
Mr M.J. Folkard	Ms S.F. McGurk	Ms M.M. Quirk	Mr R.R. Whitby
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Ms E.L. Hamilton	Mr K.J.J. Michel	Ms A. Sanderson	

Noes (6)

Ms M. Beard	Dr D.J. Honey	Ms L. Mettam
Ms M.J. Davies	Mr R.S. Love	Mr P.J. Rundle (<i>Teller</i>)

Question thus passed.