

**WEST COAST DEMERSAL SCALEFISH RESOURCE**

*Statement by Minister for Fisheries*

**MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury — Minister for Fisheries)** [1.58 pm]: I have previously brought to the attention of the house sustainability concerns relating to the demersal scalefish fishery in the west coast region between Kalbarri and Augusta, including of the iconic species pink snapper and dhufish. A formal 2010–2030 recovery plan was put in place to recover the stocks following stock assessment advice indicating that the fishery had experienced overfishing in the 1990s and early 2000s. The *West coast demersal scalefish resource harvest strategy 2021–2025*, which was developed using a stakeholder reference group and released in 2021, provides the road map to guide what future management is needed for recovery by 2030.

The most recent scientific stock assessment, released in November 2021, showed us that although current management arrangements and the efforts of fishers have been successful at preventing further stock decline, there has been limited recovery; further management action is required to allow the species to recover by 2030; and fishing pressure is still too high, as there continues to be a lack of older breeding fish in the population. Recovery of the fish stocks is not occurring at an acceptable rate, with the stocks at high to severe risk of further depletion at current catch levels. Following the release of the stock assessment, in February I accepted a recommendation of the industry-led harvest strategy working group to reduce the total catch for demersal species by 50 per cent to 375 tonnes in order to meet the 2030 recovery targets.

From April to June this year, the key sector bodies—Recfishwest, Marine Tourism Western Australia and the Western Australian Fishing Industry Council—were requested to lead the phase 1 consultation to develop their preferred primary and supporting measures for the recreational, charter and commercial sectors to meet the revised recovery benchmarks. Using the preferred measures put forward by Recfishwest, WAFIC and the MTWA in the phase 1 consultation, the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development has developed management options for the recreational sector, including charters, and the commercial sector that meet the required 50 per cent reduction needed. The proposed primary options include a 94 or 123-day limited open season option for recreational fishers, a tag system for charter licence holders and reduced total fishing hours for commercial licence holders. These proposed options were released for public consultation until 30 September 2022.

Implementation of the final set of management changes for the recreational, charter and commercial sectors to recover the west coast demersal scalefish resource is likely to occur in 2022–23. 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 total catch limits has not been made lightly. The proposed measures are designed to ensure that the future of the demersal scalefish species is safeguarded. Doing nothing is not an option. The longer we wait to take management action, the greater the risk to the sustainability of demersal stocks.