

Embargoed for publication 16 December 2025

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Government must rethink devastating demersal fishing ban: WAFIC

PERTH, WA – December 16, 2025 – The Western Australian Fishing Industry Council (WAFIC) has urgently called on the State Government to return to the negotiating table for genuine consultation on its abrupt decision to permanently ban commercial demersal fishing off a significant stretch of the WA coast.

The Government decision, announced without warning, will see commercial demersal fishing ended for good in the West Coast bioregion – an area stretching from Kalbarri to Augusta, including the Perth metropolitan coastline – from January 1.

WAFIC CEO Melissa Haslam said the industry body shared the Government's ambition for sustainable demersal fish stocks in WA waters – but the ban was a devastating blow to WA fishing families, and to the broader cohort of businesses and local economies that depend on the industry.

"This decision, and the scale of the ban, came as a profound shock. Our discussions were always on the understanding it was about recovering fish stocks, to enable sustainable fishing, not permanent closures. This decision has gone too far," she said.

"Also deeply damaging is the fact that the shark fishers have been drawn into this because of a 6% by-catch of demersal fish. This level of by-catch is incidental in the grand scheme of things, but again is a hit to affordable seafood for West Australians."

Ms Haslam said in a cost-of-living crisis, thousands of Western Australians who relied on the fishing industry were now approaching Christmas not knowing how they would earn a living in the new year, or how they'd pay their mortgages and feed their families.

"This move comes at a significant financial and emotional cost, not just to commercial fishers, but to the fishmongers, retailers, processors, transport operators, ice plants, chandlery, ship repair, and tourism operators who rely on our industry," she said.

"Rather than continuing to work collaboratively towards a solution that protects West Australian jobs and ensures access to fresh, local seafood, what has been handed down is an abrupt and unnecessary permanent ban – and our very real concern is that the flow-on impacts for tens of thousands of Western Australian families and businesses have not been fully appreciated or understood by government."

The State Government has announced just \$20 million for compulsory commercial licence buybacks. With at least 170 commercial fishing businesses directly impacted, this amounts to less than \$120,000 per business – a sum WAFIC considers manifestly inadequate.

"There is little evidence available as to how this number was reached by government," said Ms Haslam.

"Many of these family businesses have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars in licences, vessels, and equipment built up over generations. It's also worth noting that the commercial fishing licences are a layer of a much larger cake – there will be widespread ramifications, with loss of equity in every business connected in the seafood supply chain, and we are likely to see unprecedented shutdowns as a result."

WAFIC also held serious concerns about the data used to inform the decision.

"Good policy needs good science, and that science needs to be transparent and open to independent review," Ms Haslam said.

"We are deeply concerned the data being relied upon in making this decision is flawed, and does not accurately reflect stock levels – and we ask the government to commit to an independent review of the science."

Rather than a permanent ban, WAFIC is asking the Government to use the two-year closure on the West Coast to engage and consult with the commercial sector, and seek sustainable regional solutions that maintain a commercial supply of seafood to West Australians.

This time should be used to properly investigate adaptive management strategies that allow for sustainable commercial fishing while preserving local jobs, food security, and community sustainability.

At the same time, a thorough review of the broad economic impact of such a decision can be undertaken to ensure appropriate support is in place.

“There are better ways than a total permanent ban, as seen in other jurisdictions like South Australia and Tasmania, that successfully recover fish stocks without destroying local fishing industries and livelihoods,” said Ms Haslam.

“We ask government to engage with industry to better understand the full impacts of this decision, and find a way forward that is workable for all – the commercial fishers who rely on the industry, WA families who deserve access to fresh, local fish, and a sustainable future for our ocean.”

Media Contact:

Craig Sinclair – craig.sinclair@wafic.org.au or 0419 522 990

ENDS

About WAFIC

As the recognised peak body to protect, promote and support development of the commercial fishing industry in Western Australia, the WA Fishing Industry Council (WAFIC) represents professional fishing, pearling and aquaculture enterprises, processors and exporters across the State. WAFIC works to secure a responsible and sustainable industry with security of access, cost-effective fisheries management and investment in quality research and development.