

WAFIC demersal fishing ban campaign

Note: the below are designed to sit on the landing page/microsite to help inform visitors on the decision, WAFIC's position and the ask from government. These can be updated as events progress and new information becomes available.

Public FAQs

- **What is the West Coast Bioregion demersal fishing ban?**

The State Government has announced a new permanent ban on commercial demersal fishing in the West Coast Bioregion, which stretches from Kalbarri to Augusta.

- **When do these new rules come into effect?**

The permanent commercial demersal fishing ban is set to begin on January 1, 2026. This tight timeframe, and lack of prior notice, leave little room for fishing families and businesses to adapt to sustain their livelihoods.

- **Why has the State Government introduced this ban?**

The State Government states that the ban is necessary to preserve and recover demersal fish stock levels in the West Coast Bioregion, but this has been challenged by some experts. Based on discussions with the State Government prior to the announcement of the ban, WAFIC believed that measures being considered to address fish stocks levels would be focused on sustainable fishing, not permanent closures. This decision, and the scale of the ban, came as a profound shock to industry. We believe there is a better, fairer way.

- **How does this affect me?**

The sole reason commercial fishing exists is to feed those in the community who don't fish for themselves. Commercial fishers supply fresh local seafood to more than 2.9 million West Australians, as well as supplying retail stores, restaurants and tourism venues with fresh local seafood. The closure of this important fishery will mean reduced supply of your favourite local seafoods, as well as higher prices and skyrocketing increases in low quality imports. Even supply of fish and chips will be impacted.

- **What is WAFIC's stance on this demersal fishing ban?**

While WAFIC shares the State Government's ambition to preserve sustainable demersal fish stocks in WA waters, we believe this decision has gone too far and is an abrupt and unnecessary measure. We strongly oppose a permanent total ban, advocating instead for collaborative, science-backed solutions that protect both fish stocks and the livelihoods of WA's fishing families and industries.

- **Does WAFIC support sustainable fishing practices?**

Absolutely. As professional commercial fishers, our industry depends on healthy fish stocks for its future. WAFIC and its members have a proven track record of sustainable fishing practices and have been consistently and proactively working with the government to support stock recovery initiatives. Commercial fishing operations in WA are among the most regulated and monitored globally, with fishers reporting all catches and operating under strict checks and audits. Many fishing families have been fishing these waters sustainably for generations, seeing healthy fish stocks as their livelihood, heritage, and future.

- **Who will be impacted by this ban?**

Everyone who enjoys WA fish. This decision has devastating consequences for hundreds of WA businesses, regional communities, and the State's seafood industry. According to the State Government, at least 170 commercial fishing businesses holding demersal licences will be directly impacted. Beyond this, associated industries like fishmongers, retailers, processors, transport operators, ice plants, chandlery, ship repair, and tourism operators will suffer. Shark fishers will also be affected due to a .05%- 6% demersal by-catch. Tens of thousands of Western Australian families and businesses face significant financial and emotional costs, with a likely loss of equity in every business connected in the seafood supply chain.

- **What does this mean for consumers in Western Australia?**

Ultimately, the ban means West Australians will pay more for less fresh local seafood, if they can find it in stores or on restaurant menus. The ban will significantly impact the cost of local fish, likely driving prices up to levels that are unaffordable to many.

When local dhufish, snapper, and other demersal species disappear from menus and fish shops, they will likely be replaced with imported fish, if they can be replaced at all. This increases reliance on international markets, many of which operate under less stringent controls or sustainable practices than WA's highly regulated fisheries.

- **What are WAFIC's concerns regarding the scientific data used to justify this decision?**

WAFIC has significant concerns about the scientific data. While stock assessment models have been peer-reviewed, the underlying data collection process has not been adequately interrogated.

We believe the data collection methods can lead to skewed results, particularly in failing to accurately account for recreational fishing's impact due to a lack of timely reporting frameworks. For example, recreational post-release mortality for dhufish alone is estimated at 18,500 fish annually (equivalent to 25 tonnes), a significant impact not adequately factored into management decisions.

Good policy needs good science, and that science needs to be transparent and open to independent review. We are deeply concerned the data being relied upon in making this decision does not accurately reflect stock levels, and we urge the Government to commit to an independent review of the science.

- **Was the fishing industry consulted before this decision was made?**

There was no genuine consultation with industry. The decision was communicated abruptly, and no options were provided or discussed. The opportunity for written submissions was initially offered, then withdrawn in favour of an online survey, and then only reinstated with very short timelines after strong objections from industry. A "Fishing Futures Forum" held just weeks after the stock assessment was released provided minimal opportunity for feedback and involved only hand-picked attendees. Other fisheries like shark had no understanding they would be brought into the decision, and only learned of the impact to their fisheries through media after the decision was made.

- **What compensation has the government offered to affected fishers?**

The WA government has committed to a \$20 million funding package allocated specifically to buy out commercial line and gillnet licences in the west coast. This compensation is limited solely to licence buybacks. Fisheries Minister Jackie Jarvis has agreed to some pre-payments, but these will be drawn from the existing package, meaning no additional financial support has been promised.

- **Is the government's compensation package adequate?**

The existing compensation package fails to acknowledge the true value of these generational businesses and the devastating impact on livelihoods. With the Government indicating over 170 commercial fishing businesses impacted, the package amounts to less than \$120,000 per business. There is little evidence available as to how this number was reached by government, and many of these family businesses have invested hundreds of thousands of dollars over generations in licences, vessels, and equipment. It's also important to note that commercial fishing licences are just one aspect – there will be widespread ramifications and a loss of equity in every business connected in the seafood supply chain, potentially leading to unprecedented shutdowns without any compensation.

- **Are there alternative solutions to a permanent ban for managing fish stocks?**

Yes. WAFIC believes that adaptive management strategies are far more appropriate and effective than a blunt, permanent ban. Such strategies could include quota reductions, seasonal closures, spatial management, and gear restrictions. WAFIC was already consulting with the government on such initiatives and anticipated reduced catch levels for 2026, but not a total and permanent ban. WAFIC is specifically asking the Government to pause commercial fishing on the West Coast to allow time to properly engage and consult with the commercial sector and seek sustainable regional solutions that maintain a commercial supply of seafood to West Australians. This period could be used to properly investigate adaptive management strategies and undertake a thorough review of the broad economic impact of such a decision. We are ready and willing to work with the government to find solutions that benefit everyone.

- **Have other jurisdictions successfully recovered fish stocks without permanent bans?**

Yes.

Western Australia's Gascoyne demersal fishery was successfully recovered by commercial fishers themselves. By using adaptive management strategies and a move to quota, the demersal stocks returned to sustainable levels.

- **What is WAFIC asking the State Government to do now?**

WAFIC is urgently calling for the State Government to:

- Return to the negotiating table for genuine and constructive discussions on timing, proper consultation, and comprehensive support.
- Instead of a permanent ban, pause commercial fishing on the West Coast to genuinely engage and consult with the commercial sector.
- Seek sustainable regional solutions that maintain a commercial supply of seafood to West Australians, investigating adaptive management strategies that preserve local jobs, food security, and community sustainability.
- Provide improved financial support for the industry, potentially including increased funds for licence buybacks, support payments for all impacted industry participants beyond just licence holders, and interim support payments.
- Commit to an independent review of the science used to justify the decision, ensuring this decision is transparent, open, and subject to

procedural fairness for the confidence of all Western Australians industries.

- Engage with industry to better understand the full impacts of this decision.
- Undertake a thorough review of the broad economic impact of such a decision to ensure appropriate support is in place.

- **How can the community support WAFIC and the local fishing industry?**

You can support WAFIC and the commercial fishing industry by:

- Understanding and advocating for the vital role our commercial fishing sector plays in providing fresh, local seafood and sustaining regional communities.
- Supporting WAFIC's call for genuine consultation, science-backed solutions, and fair compensation by contacting your local Member of Parliament to share your concerns.
- Sharing this information with your friends, family, and on social media to help raise awareness.
- Signing any relevant petitions.
- Choose local, sustainably caught seafood when available, and understanding the challenges faced by our local fishers.
- Write to your local MP. A base template and contact details are provided on this site.