

# QUEENSLAND SEAFOOD

AUTUMN 2026



- More “no fishing” zones?
- Scallop ban continues
- White spot controversy
- WA fish ban shock
- Major trout investment

**FUEL CHALLENGES FOR FISHING INDUSTRY**

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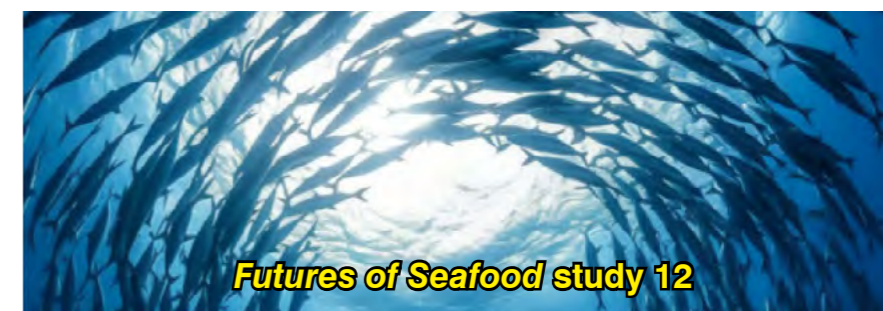


## QUEENSLAND SEAFOOD

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Front cover: Cairns-based Bruce Batch on *Sydney Lewis*, his 18-metre Victorian-built ex-crayboat. Bruce is one of 21 fishers interviewed on-camera for an FRDC-funded project to record the stories and histories of Queensland net fishing. (See article on page 30.)



This program is proudly funded and supported by the Queensland Government.

## PRESIDENT ON THE LINE

### Strong industry representation is essential

HELLO members. I hope you are keeping well and that 2026 has started positively for you. There is a great deal happening across all fisheries, and this has kept our Executive Officer (EO) extremely busy attending meetings and staying across the issues affecting our industry. Strong representation is essential. We need to keep our finger on the pulse and we cannot afford a repeat of the gillnet situation, where industry was blindsided by not being at the table.

The trawl fishery has had a small but important win with the partial reopening of the scallop fishery. However, the requirement for independent data validation through onboard cameras is now locked in for the trawl fleet. Based on my own experience with monitoring equipment, I strongly encourage all participants to ensure there is clear evidence that the equipment is fit for purpose, and that conditions relating to equipment failure are flexible enough to allow vessels to continue operating while issues are resolved. Do not be taken in by the familiar narrative from Fisheries Queensland (FQ) that systems can be introduced now and fixed on the fly.

Progress on alternative gear trials for the net fishery appears to be very slow, with very low percentages of Tier 1 fish being reported as caught. Feedback from the marketing sector indicates real concern about supply once the NX fishery is terminated in mid-2027. There is also significant pushback from other groups around the apparatus that are being trialled. At some point, the rights of the seafood consumer must be considered. QSIA is waiting for the outcomes of the independent sustainability assessment of the NX net fishery, which will be critical for determining next steps for the future of the east coast inshore fin fishery.

The Spanish mackerel fishery has had its total allowable catch (TAC) increased but fishers remain concerned that the quota will never be harvested due to severe access restrictions, particularly the continuity of the six-week closures. Catch data for the 2025-26 quota year shows the fishery will struggle to reach 150 tonnes, even with lower quota prices. More work is needed to rebuild what remains of this once iconic fishery.

An in-person QSIA Board meeting was held in Brisbane in early February. It was good to meet the new Board members and I am confident they will bring a fresh approach to the table. One of the issues discussed was the development of a tiered membership structure, and you will have seen correspondence from the EO on this. We also received a presentation from Director Karen Miller on the new Queensland Catch website, and she has done a stellar job putting it together. We hope to launch this in late March 2026.

QSIA has hit the ground running in 2026. There are many issues facing our industry nationally under the current Federal Labor Government. Fortunately, here in Queensland we have a government that is willing to work with industry. I encourage you to speak with your local Member of Parliament and keep them informed about the issues affecting your fishery.

#### Fuel action

You are all aware of the issues along the Queensland coast in relation to diesel fuel distribution and price. Your Association has been leading the way in making sure Federal Government Ministers and media are aware of the impact this is having on industry, and the Executive Officer has been busy talking to politicians, press and fellow industry representatives about the action needed.

Among others, he has spoken to Minister for Industry & Innovation and Science Tim Ayres and Cairns-based Senator Nita Green, and we now have a direct line to the Federal Government. And it's pleasing to see Minister for Climate Change & Energy Chris Bowen and Premier David Crisafulli including the fishing industry in recent media statements.

It was also great to see the concerns of QSIA and other industry representatives getting front-page coverage (plus a double-page spread inside and an editorial) in *The Courier-Mail* on March 13. It is vital that the views of the fishing industry are heard on vital issues like fuel.

In our media statements, QSIA called for immediate action on the distribution and price of fuel. Urgent action is needed to ensure fuel is available at a price that allows businesses like fishing, farming and transport to keep working. Arrangements are already in place to return fuel tax to vessel-owners and that could be adapted to maintain an economic price for diesel in particular. We will ensure that your issues continue to be heard. However, to do this effectively, QSIA needs to know about all the issues in your port around fuel. That is the only way we can help ensure fuel supply gets to where it is needed. Please give David a call on 0417 631 353.

#### 30x30 plans

In response to inquiries from QSIA to Federal Environment Minister Murray Watt, the Minister has confirmed the Government plans to expand "no fishing" zones in Australian waters by a quarter – and the Coral Sea Marine Park and North Marine Park Network off Queensland are in line for increases. (More details on pages 7 and 27.) This is a very important issue with major implications for Queensland fishermen, and QSIA is following up with the Minister's advisors and his Department.

In the meantime, good fishing and stay safe.

Allan

**Allan Bobbermen**  
President

## FROM THE CEO

### Our goal: ensuring fishers are heard, respected, supported

QSIA has been working at a rapid pace, reflecting the continued pressure the Queensland commercial fishing and broader seafood sector is under. After a short break over Christmas, it has been a period of meetings, negotiations, technical work and conversations with members. Through all of it, the Association has stayed focused on the same goal: making sure Queensland's commercial fishers are heard, respected and supported.

Problems with distribution and pricing of fuel, plus the Federal Government's planned expansion of "no fishing" zones as part of its 30x30 marine park plans, are major issues right now, and we are working on these direct with Government and with our national organisation, Seafood Industry Australia.

A major part of our other work this quarter has been helping the trawl fleet navigate the complicated proposed changes for scallops and the rollout of Independent Onboard Monitoring. QSIA has also been assisting the development of an extended permitted-species list. It's slow work but it's essential if we want rules that are fair, practical and enforceable.

We also had the Torres Strait, Northern and Central Region Tiger and Endeavour Prawn Fishery Improvement Program (FIP) published. This was a significant piece of work taking over two years to realise. We are now working on the Southern Offshore Eastern King Prawn FIP and hope to have this published in the coming months.

Harvest strategies have also been front and centre, as most are up for review this year. These documents shape how fisheries are managed, and proposed changes can have significant impact on profitability. QSIA has been, and will continue to be, involved in harvest strategy consultation, pushing for more flexible and timely decision rules that don't punish operators, while maintaining or rebuilding stock levels. The message is simple: sustainability matters but so does the survival of the people who put seafood on Queensland tables.

Throughout all of this, QSIA has been representing the industry in meetings with the Queensland Department of Primary Industries (QDPI) and others. We submitted a response to the consultation regarding take of barramundi in gillnets south of Tin Can Bay. Work on the Fishing and Seafood Industry Action Plan also continues. We have been working with the FishLight team to explore other trap opportunities and NX Fishers (and wholesalers / retailers) advocating for the continued guaranteed supply of locally-caught estuary and nearshore fish.

While progress is often slow, the Association has been consistent in pushing for fair treatment,

and evidence-based decisions, while setting the environment for improved profitability and investment in the industry. At the same time, QSIA has been keeping members informed and provided one-on-one support. Many operators have said how much they value having clear, timely information.

The February in-person Board meeting provided a moment to pause and reflect on the year, confirm the Board responsibilities, and talk about priorities for 2026. What came through strongly was the need for continued advocacy and a united voice. The advocacy must include a voice for consumers. The industry faces big challenges, and QSIA's role has never been more important.

Public communication has been another major focus. QSIA has responded to media enquiries on everything from seafood supply to environmental claims, always reinforcing the professionalism and sustainability of Queensland's commercial fishers.

Of course, not everything is resolved. Several issues remain on the table and require continued attention in the months ahead. These include the Gulf of Carpentaria Harvest Strategy, WTO conditions and the continued supply of locally caught seafood to consumers – particularly with the current deadline for the NX Fishery rapidly approaching. And, as always, the industry continues to grapple with public misconceptions (including greenwashing) that disproportionately influence policy and media narratives.

In May, Queensland hosts the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea / UN Food and Agriculture Organization Working Group on Fishing Technology and Fish Behaviour in Cairns (see [www.wgftfb.org](http://www.wgftfb.org)). Then, in July, the biennial Seafood Directions conference will be held in Sydney. The Fishing and Seafood Industry Action Plan will also be high on the agenda, as it is due to be released in the middle of the year.

We also plan to publish the new Queensland Catch internet site very soon. Keep an eye on our socials for this. The national Futures of Seafood Project, the Federal Food Security Strategy and Country of Origin Seafood Labelling are also on the radar.

Despite these challenges, the past three months have shown the strength and resilience of Queensland's seafood sector. QSIA has been working hard to support members, challenge policy, and promote the value of local seafood. There is a lot of work ahead but the Association remains committed to standing with industry and ensuring the voices of Queensland's fishers (and consumers) are heard where it matters most.

As you will see, the *Queensland Seafood* magazine has had a light makeover. I hope you like it and, if there are any further enhancements that you would like to see, please let me know.

**David Bobbermen**  
Executive Officer

## NEWS BRIEFS

### QSIA defending road-tax rebate on fishing fuel

THE QSIA has defended continuation of the road-tax rebate on fuel for the fishing industry, calling on the Federal Government to maintain the current arrangements.

QSIA Executive Officer David Bobbermen said in a media release that imposing the road tax on fuel used in commercial fishing vessels would “kill the industry”.

“Fuel costs are high and profit margins are tight in commercial fishing,” he said. “Imposing a road tax on the industry and increasing fuel costs by more than 50 cents a litre would push many operators over the edge.”

Mr Bobbermen said there had been discussion in the lead-up to the Federal Government budget in May



that the rebate of diesel tax to primary industry and mining for off-road fuel use should be scrapped but this would be catastrophic for fishing families and other primary producers.

In February, Australian Greens parliamentary leader Larissa Waters said she was “backing in the momentum for the Treasurer to abolish the billions of dollars in fossil

fuel subsidies given to mining companies as an urgent measure in the upcoming budget”, adding that even Labor’s own Environment Action Network had come on board the long-standing Greens policy.

“The Federal Government applies a tax of more than 50 cents a litre on fuel to pay for road works. It is a road tax. Fishing vessels – and farmers’ tractors and miners’ onsite machines – don’t use roads, and so that tax is returned to them in the form of a rebate. The refund of fuel tax has operated this way for 20 years,” Mr Bobbermen said.

“Opponents of mining in particular characterise that rebate as a ‘subsidy’. It is not a subsidy. It is a rebate of a tax that does not apply to primary producers and miners. Applying it to primary producers like commercial fishers would effectively tax many operators out of business.

“The seafood industry cannot absorb additional costs to operations. We already compete heavily with imports coming from other countries with much less regulation and lower production costs, including fuel costs.

“The existing rebate on diesel and petrol used in on-water fishing operations is critical to maintaining a viable Queensland seafood industry and continuing the supply

### Government to increase “no fishing” zones by a quarter

FEDERAL Environment Minister Murray Watt has confirmed the Government plans to expand “no fishing” zones in Australian waters by a quarter – and the Coral Sea Marine Park and North Marine Park Network off Queensland are in line for increases.

In response to a QSIA letter inquiring about the Federal Government’s intentions, Minister Watt wrote back on March 12 to say he intends to increase the no-fishing zones from 24 per cent of Australian waters to 30 per cent, a one-quarter expansion of the areas where no form of fishing (commercial or recreational) will be allowed.

“Australia is a world leader in marine protection, with marine protected areas currently covering 52 per cent of Australia’s ocean, including 24 per cent of our ocean under a high level of protection,” Minister Watt wrote. “As you note, I made the commitment

to achieve a 30 per cent high protection target, which will build on our success as a leader in sustainable ocean management, and will help protect important habitats and assist in maintaining the productivity of the ocean.

“The development of five new Australian Marine Park network management plans (including the Coral Sea Marine Park and the North Marine Park Network) is the primary opportunity to meet the 30 per cent target. The new plans will seek to achieve a balance in ocean protection, while enabling sustainable marine industries and activities, and will be guided by the best available science and stakeholder consultation.

“Consultation with industry is key to reaching a balanced outcome. As a first step, industry will have the opportunity to input to the Independent Evaluation of the existing 2018 management plans, and

then through two periods of statutory consultation during the development of the new management plans.

“Thank you again for raising this matter with me. I have requested the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water update you on the broader review process, and to ensure that QSIA is offered the opportunity to engage in the review process.

“I look forward to continuing constructive engagement throughout the review. I have copied this letter to the Hon Julie Collins MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry.”

He added that his office would also contact the QSIA separately. The QSIA was expecting to have discussions with both the Minister’s advisors and Departmental staff later in March. Current zoning plans: <https://australian-marineparks.gov.au/parks/coral-sea-marine-park/> and <https://australianmarineparks.gov.au/parks/north-marine-parks-network/>

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#### UPDATES

**MORETON BAY – WHITE SPOT DISEASE CLASS ACTION** – the claim is still powering along. Big litigation like this takes time as it is complex. The current target to complete is by the end of 2026.

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of Queensland’s sustainably caught seafood.

“To ensure fishing operations are economically viable and the community maintains its access to fresh local seafood, and to ensure the employment of Queenslanders and businesses in the agriculture and mining sectors, QSIA supports the retention of the current fuel tax credit program.

“We are calling on the Federal Government to maintain the rebate program in its current form.”

Note: For fuel rebate details, see the ATO site: <https://www.ato.gov.au/businesses-and-organisations/income-deductions-and-concessions/incentives-and-concessions/fuel-schemes/fuel-tax-credits-business/rates-business/from-1-july-2025-to-30-june-2026#Table1>

### Halt to imported prawn disease tests risks Reef

THE Federal Government has been warned its proposal to stop disease-testing all consignments of imported prawns is a threat to the Great Barrier Reef.

QSIA Executive Officer David Bobbermen said lax national biosecurity checks had already allowed the deadly virus called white spot disease (WSD) to infect crustaceans in Moreton Bay and further disease introductions could be devastating.

“The threat of further foreign disease outbreaks is a noose round the neck of the fishing industry Australia-wide,” he said. “WSD was discovered in Moreton Bay in 2016 and



A prawn with WSD.

is now endemic in south-east Queensland waters, and there has been a second, separate introduction in northern New South Wales.

“If WSD or other diseases escaped from uncooked prawn or fish imports in North Queensland, it could seriously impact prawns, shrimp, crab and other crustaceans — even worms — on the Great Barrier

*Continued over page.*

## Fuel issues for fishing industry acknowledged

BOTH the Federal and State Governments have acknowledged the problems caused for the Queensland fishing industry by interrupted distribution and high prices of fuel – though, like farmers and truck drivers, fishermen were yet to see any solutions when this issue of *Queensland Seafood* went to press.

On March 10, QSIA issued a media release calling for immediate action on the distribution and price of fuel, warning governments fishing-vessel owners could go broke if forced to tie up for extended periods or pay more for their fuel than the catch is worth.

QSIA Executive Officer David Bobbermen said fishermen in a number of ports had reported



Fuel issues for the fishing industry have been front page news in Queensland.

fuel was unavailable and, in other ports where fuel was still being supplied, prices were making it uneconomic to fill up and put back out to sea.

“This has all the indicators of a crisis for the fishing industry,” he said. “Urgent action is needed to ensure fuel is available at a price that allows businesses like fishing, farming and transport to keep working. We need to see guaranteed supply and price relief. Arrangements are already in place to return fuel tax and that could be adapted to maintain an economic price for diesel in particular.”

His comments were widely reported and several media outlets conducted interviews with him and other industry representatives, and also drew acknowledgement from both federal and State politicians about the fuel situation facing fishermen. (See the “President on the Line” column for more details.)



Queensland Seafood Industry Awards winners with Minister for Primary Industries Tony Perrett.

## Seafood awards

THE Queensland Seafood Marketers Association has hosted the 2026 Queensland Seafood Industry Awards in Brisbane on March 13. Winners are now in the running for national awards at the Seafood Directions conference in Sydney in July. Below are the award names and winners (in the order they were announced).

- ❑ Young Achiever: Bryan Van Wyk
- ❑ People Development: QSIA & Clear Cut Training
- ❑ Research, Development & Extension: Australian Council of Prawn Fisheries

- ❑ Environment: NPF
- ❑ Health & Safety: Stay Afloat
- ❑ Primary Producer (Small): Mofo Fishing
- ❑ Primary Producer (Large): Rocky Point Aquaculture
- ❑ Business (Small): The Fish Girl
- ❑ Business (Large): Preston Fresh
- ❑ Promotion: Little Tuna
- ❑ Restaurant: Donna Chang
- ❑ Seafood Experience: Taste Port Douglas
- ❑ Take-Away Fish & Chips: Wild Local
- ❑ Industry Ambassador: David Ellis.

There will be full details in the next edition of *Queensland Seafood*.

*Continued from previous page.*

Reef. It could damage the Outstanding Universal Value of the Great Barrier Reef and put its World Heritage status at risk.”

Mr Bobbermen said the Animal Biosecurity Branch of the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry (DAFF) intends to cut back its current 100 per cent testing of incoming prawn consignments and shift responsibility for checks to the exporting countries.

The QSIA joined the Australian Prawn Farmers Association and the Australian Council of Prawn Fisheries in warning that proposed DAFF guidelines would dangerously weaken Australia’s biosecurity by slashing border testing for imported raw prawns.

Under the changes, exporting countries such as India, Thailand and Vietnam — where white spot and other diseases are present — could have their own pre-export testing systems recognised as “equivalent”,

triggering a shift away from Australia’s current 100 per cent on-arrival testing, he said, a step backwards toward the weak settings that preceded the 2016 White Spot disaster.

Mr Bobbermen said industry warnings had previously been ignored by government.

“Ten years before the 2016 introduction of WSD, the QSIA publicly warned that importing uncooked prawns from countries where WSD was endemic — and their use for fishing bait by anglers buying these cheap raw prawns in supermarkets — could see WSD escape into the wild.

“That is exactly what’s believed to have happened. The Federal Government ignored our warning 20 years ago, at great cost to the seafood industry and the environment. I hope they don’t do it again. The Federal Government must maintain strict biosecurity checks on imported seafood. It’s vital for Australian fishers and for our marine environment.”

## Raptis & Sons in administration

A. RAPTIS & Sons Pty Ltd has gone into voluntary administration. FTI Consulting advised on March 7 that they had been appointed voluntary administrators by resolution of A. Raptis & Sons’ directors.

“As Administrators, we have taken control of the Companies’ operations,” they said. “We are working with the management team and staff, and other relevant stakeholders, to undertake an urgent assessment of the business and restructuring options. We are continuing to operate the business while this assessment is undertaken.” (The seafood auctions will continue.)

Email inquiries: [raptis@fticonsulting.com](mailto:raptis@fticonsulting.com)


Further information: <https://www.fticonsulting.com/creditors/a-raptis-and-sons-pty-ltd-administrators-appointed>

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# Four-year “no take” rule continues on major scallop ground



While the Queensland Government has decided to maintain a ban on taking scallops from the State’s most productive grounds, frustrated trawl fishermen shovel thousands of dollars’ worth of shell off their sorting trays back into the sea.

THE QSIA has protested the Queensland Government decision to continue a ban on scallop fishing in the State’s major production region.

Queensland Seafood Industry Association (QSIA) Executive Officer David Bobbermen said in mid-January that harvesting of scallops had already been banned for more than four years in trawl-fishing grounds from approximately Yeppoon to Hervey Bay and the State Government’s decision would see this ban continue indefinitely.

“Trawl operators I have spoken to, along with seafood processors and marketers, are very disappointed with this decision,” he said. “We would have preferred a cautious re-opening of the grounds so that fishers could explore and see what scallops are out there.

“The scallop population in what is called the ‘southern inshore region’ was previously calculated to be around 15 per cent of what it would have been without any fishing and the Queensland Government wants this to be at least 20 per cent of the ‘unfished population’ before re-opening the fishery.

“The harvesting of scallops there was banned in September 2021. It’s hard to believe that, after four years with no harvesting of scallops, the population has not moved from 15 per cent to at least 20 per cent. There was a short survey in 2025 but allowing boats to cautiously explore for scallops, with daily monitoring, would be a more

effective way of discovering what quantity of scallops might be out there.”

Mr Bobbermen said scallop populations historically had fluctuated widely from one season to the next and they were difficult to predict. “A year ago, trawlers catching prawns in the same region were catching and releasing large quantities of scallops, indicating a sizeable population. Have these scallops simply disappeared?”

He added that what is classified as the “central trawl grounds” – from approximately Yeppoon to Cairns – had also been closed to scallop fishing as a precaution for an identical four-year period. This region will now be re-opened but generally produces far smaller catches than the southern region.

“The QSIA will continue talking to the Queensland Government about scallop management to try to find a more sophisticated solution to this issue.”

A Queensland Government statement said it was developing a “science-backed, five-year rebuilding strategy to restore Queensland’s saucer scallop stocks”. “The scallop rebuilding strategy delivers on the Crisafulli Government’s election commitment for scientifically based decision making and casts aside Labor’s ideologically driven approach. The statement highlighted the claim “The Crisafulli Government is delivering a better lifestyle through a stronger economy, with a plan for Queensland’s future.”

It said the Government’s scallop-rebuilding strategy recommends a total allowable commercial catch (TACC) of 167,776 kg for the 2026 season in the central region – to be implemented through an in-possession limit for commercial fishers – and 248,609 kg for the southern offshore region.

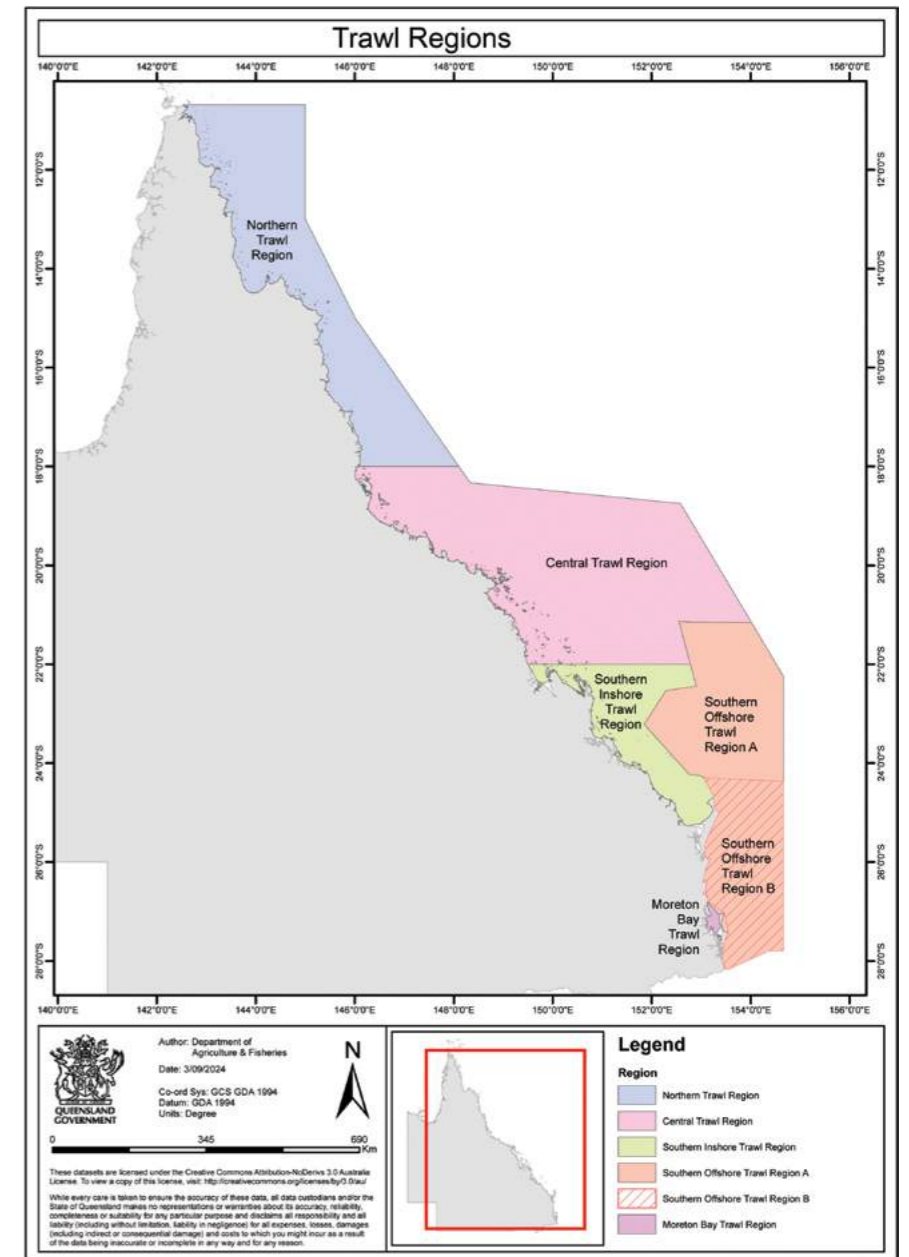
The statement also said the scallop fishery would remain closed (no-take) in the southern inshore region, as the 2025 survey found biomass levels remain low and below the 20 per cent reference point for the fishery, judging from a “fishery-independent survey” in 2025, between industry and the Department of Primary Industries.

Primary Industries Minister Tony Perrett said this science-backed approach was helping maintain the fishery’s export approval, boost productivity and viability in the commercial sector and expand opportunities for the industry.

Mr Perrett was quoted as saying: “The rebuilding strategy prioritises stock recovery, aiming to maintain scallop spawning biomass above the 20 per cent limit reference point and increase it towards 40 per cent within five years.

“This scientifically-backed decision making approach is exactly the platform we took to the 2024 election and, importantly, it aligns with our Primary Industries Prosper 2050 initiative, and national and international sustainability standards, and ensures the fishery maintains its export approval under the Commonwealth obligations.”

Industry veteran Paul Grunske from Grunske’s by the River Seafood Market & Takeaway told the ABC that trawl operators were catching large numbers of scallops and were frustrated at having to throw away thousands of dollars’ worth of scallops because of the continuing “no take” for the southern zone. At the same time, he was forced to import scallops from Japan to meet demand.



This map shows the East Coast trawl region.

Mr Grunske said operators targeting prawns and bugs were also bringing up large quantities of scallops in their nets at the same time but all the shell had to be returned to the sea.

“It’s taken millions of dollars out of Bundaberg’s economy and the broader community’s economy,” he said. “It’s been a complete disaster for scallop fishers.”

Mr Grunske posted video of scallop catches to the Grunske’s by the River Facebook site. (See: <https://www.facebook.com/reel/4184048888478281>)

His comments were supported by Ben Grunske on

the 20-metre trawler *Monsoon*, who told the media in January the numbers of scallops he was seeing every night paints a different picture to the reports of low numbers.

“The big mature scallops we’re catching out here now won’t be here next year, they’ll die out on the ground whether we catch them or not,” he said. “It’s a waste of good product.”

Further information: <https://statements.qld.gov.au/statements/104306> and <https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2026-01-28/scallop-fishery-ban-extended-queensland/106270080>



# CHARTING A NEW COURSE

Has a two-year national study of the seafood industry plotted a new course to prosperity?

**W**HAT is regarded as a landmark report for the Australian seafood industry outlining a strategic reset for domestic production has been released for comment.

The draft report presents the results of a two-year *Futures of Seafood* study. The study developed three trajectory scenarios to illustrate possible futures for Australian seafood: “struggling”, “surviving” and “thriving”. The authors rate the Australian seafood production as currently somewhere between struggling and surviving but map out a potential growth pathway to a thriving future.

A so-called national roadmap for the industry was released for industry comment on February 11. It outlines what the authors describe as a strategic reset for Australia’s domestic seafood production, sovereignty and growth from 2026 to 2035.

The *Futures of Seafood* study consolidates the most comprehensive evidence base assembled for Australia’s seafood system, they say. Drawing on integrated spatial mapping, economic modelling, stakeholder engagement and scenario analysis, it provides a system-level assessment of the pressures shaping Australia’s marine estate and the strategic choices required to secure long-term national seafood capability.

The evidence confirms that climate volatility,

regulatory duplication, competing ocean uses, market exposure, fragmented representation and fragile public confidence are not discrete challenges. They are interacting, system-wide constraints that compound over time. Left unaddressed, they will continue to undermine production certainty, deter investment, weaken social licence and erode seafood’s contribution to Australia’s food and nutritional security.

The national roadmap offers a response for industry, government, research and investors to reset the seafood system through two complementary national system resets: National Reform Priorities and National System Enablers.

A set of National Reform Priorities would stabilise the operating environment, and restore and build confidence. These focus on establishing a national seafood guarantee, optimising the research and innovation system, coordinating market and communication approaches, strengthening mechanisms for industry unity, and building a national rapid response capability. Together, these interventions address the structural weaknesses identified by the study, reduce duplication, retire unmanaged risk, and lift the system’s capacity to adapt to climate, market and policy shocks.

A set of National System Enablers would ensure benefits of this work endure beyond the study itself. This includes establishing and

maintaining national data infrastructure, the ongoing provision of accessible knowledge products, the maintenance of analytical models and decision-support tools, modernisation of governance and system architecture, and a clear national impact narrative. These enablers shift decision-making from fragmented and reactive to evidence-led, coordinated and future-focused across jurisdictions and sectors.

Together, these offer a framework to transition Australia’s seafood system from its current fragmented state to one that is coordinated, adaptive and strategically positioned. It will drive “better seafood” across a staged pathway: “stabilisation” (2026-27), “transition” (2028-30) and “thriving” (2031-35), reflecting realistic sequencing while maintaining strategic ambition.

“The roadmap recognises that, collectively, we can strengthen sovereign seafood capability, improve resilience to climate and market disruption, enhance regulatory efficiency, and secure long-term economic, environmental, social, cultural and nutritional value,” the authors say. “This roadmap provides the foundation for that reset, offering a clear, credible direction for building a future-ready Australian seafood system.”

Discussing the report on the *ABC Country Hour* program, Seafood Industry Australia Acting CEO Julie Petty said



what the project highlighted was that no-one really had total oversight over the trajectory of where the sector was heading.

And, while the study showed the Australian seafood industry has a value of around \$12 billion a year, it is still in a “struggling” phase.

“We’ve got the third largest ocean territory on earth, with world-leading fisheries management and some genuine sustainability credentials – but we’re at this tipping point,” Ms Petty said. “So, we need to look at a strategic intervention, otherwise we’re going to continue in this struggling phase and what that will result in is just a further increase in import dependence when we’re already importing 64 per cent of the seafood that Australians eat.”

Ms Petty added: “We have the opportunity here to co-design our future

with government and with the research sector. All government, the research sector and industry, there’s going to be change required from us all and, within the roadmap, there are particular call-outs and actions that we’ll each have carriage of.

“But if we can work out a pathway forward that suits all of these purposes and meets the needs of all of these different users, we actually are extremely well positioned to be able to grow this sector and unlock its potential. That’s really what it’s about. It’s about unlocking the potential here with, as I said, the third largest ocean territory in Australia and a really innovative aquaculture sector.”

The *Futures of Seafood* report has been prepared by the Blue Economy CRC for Seafood Industry Australia, supported by funding from the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation, Blue Economy CRC, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry, and the Department of Climate Change, Energy, Environment & Water, with in-kind contributions from Australian Fisheries Management Forum members, industry and research partners.

To read the detailed, 41-page draft report, go to: <https://futuresofseafood.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/Futures-of-Seafood-Roadmap-Document-Interactive-V7.pdf>



The *Futures of Seafood* study has calculated the value of seafood production in Australia. The gross value of production is \$3,071 million, final sales value \$8,846 million and gross domestic product \$11,914 million, generating 79,491 fulltime-equivalent jobs. Queensland is the second-most-valuable of the States and the Northern Territory, with gross value of production at \$484 million, final sales value \$1,377 million and gross domestic product (GDP) \$2,000 million, generating 13,242 fulltime-equivalent jobs. The others rank from: Tasmania, GDP \$4,299 million (thanks largely to farmed Atlantic salmon); WA \$1,442 million; South Australia \$1,360 million; New South Wales \$815 million; the Northern Territory \$499; to Victoria \$359 million.

# Seafood industry loses a champion: Ron Boswell

The Australian seafood industry has lost a great champion and mentor with the death of former Senator Ron Boswell in early January. He was 85.

RON Boswell's funeral in St Stephen's Cathedral in Brisbane reflected the standing in which he was held by politicians, primary producers, small business operators, ethnic groups and religious leaders throughout Australia.

The hundreds attending the funeral included Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Premier David Crisafulli, former Liberal leader Peter Dutton, former protégé Barnaby Joyce, Ron Boswell's "successor" in the Senate, Matt Canavan, and many other current and former State and federal politicians and political figures. Former PM John Howard attended and read a eulogy.

Others included representatives of the seafood industry, sugar, banana, ginger, pineapple and tobacco growers, dairy farmers and beef producers, the taxi industry, Post Office franchisees, pharmacists, representatives of the Jewish community from as far as Melbourne, Chinese

and Vietnamese community members, and other groups he had helped during his 31 years in the Senate.

"Bozzie" left school at 14. Jobs he held before entering politics included as a travelling salesman taking orders for locally-made products.

"I do not have a formal degree, but there can be no better qualification for serving in Parliament than actually having run your own business," Ron told the Senate in his farewell speech in June 2014. "The microbusiness of R. Boswell & Co employed nine people and taught me how a business must run, to keep control of spending, the interaction between staff, good times, hard times, making sales – because that keeps your staff in jobs. It was a great training ground."

He took that real-world experience into politics, and always tried to create and protect jobs, especially in rural and regional areas. And, while

he spent a lot of time in the regions, he never pretended to be anything but a city boy: no broad-brimmed hats and elastic-sided boots. Ron never pretended to be anything he wasn't.

Ron's wife Leita's dad was in the National Party and recruited Ron. Ron lived at Wynnum, loved seafood and the ocean – but for one capsized while leading in a crucial selection race he would have represented Australia in two-handed sailing – and got involved with the Queensland fishing industry early.

Ron explained once that his interest in fish and fishing was generated by growing up around Moreton Bay and spending a lot of time on the water. "I had seen the fishing industry at work in Moreton Bay and elsewhere, and valued the opportunity to buy products like prawns, bugs and other seafood I couldn't catch myself."

Ron was always fond of



*"Farmers and fishermen ... represent the very best in Australian character, physically courageous, battling the elements and the unforgiving environment, and prepared to work hard in remote locations to create wealth for the country. These people reflect the true Australian spirit of taking a risk, having a go and persevering when times are tough."*

Ron Boswell 2014

fishermen. He enjoyed sitting on the balcony of his riverfront unit at East Brisbane, watching beam trawlers working prawns. He valued the character traits of fishermen and farmers, and their contribution to regional economies. He singled them out in his 2014 farewell speech to the Senate.

"Let me talk a little bit about primary producers," he said, "people of whom I am so fond. They include farmers and fishermen and others who represent the very best in Australian character, physically courageous, battling the elements and the unforgiving environment, and prepared to work hard in remote locations to create wealth for the country. These people reflect the true Australian spirit of taking a risk, having a go and persevering when times are tough."

The industry was equally fond of him. At the national Seafood Directions conference in 2022, Ron was inducted into the Australian Seafood Industry Hall of Fame, recognised for 40 years' involvement with the seafood industry. His work included engineering more than \$200 million in compensation for both on-water and on-shore seafood businesses severely impacted by re-zoning of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in the early 2000s.

After leaving politics in mid-2014, Ron was appointed Chair of the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation (FRDC). It was a job that, in a sense, almost killed him. Keen

to take a second term at the FRDC but believing painful knees would stop him walking round inspecting FRDC-funded projects the way he believed he should, he decided on a knee-replacement operation. Recovery from routine surgery went awry and he went into intensive-care, literally on death's door. Ron pulled through but spent a long time recovering.

Retiring from the FRDC role at that point, he turned to writing a book on his decades in Parliament (with the assistance of longtime advisor Joanne Newbery), and maintained a keen interest in current political events and in the seafood industry, remaining a mentor to younger politicians and fishing industry leaders up till the time of his death.

## Parting words

When he retired in 2014, then QSIA Chair Karen Collard wrote: "Senator Ron Boswell has retired after 31 years in the Australian Senate, a staunch defender of the fishing industry for all of those years. What will we do without him? 'Bozzie', as he was affectionately known, could always be relied upon to take industry's issues to the Federal Government Ministers of the day, whether Coalition members like him or Labor. He was a uniquely forceful and effective politician.

"On behalf of a grateful industry, Senator Boswell, I would like to say a heartfelt 'Thank you' and wish you well in your retirement. You will

always be remembered with warmth and affection."

QSIA Executive Officer David Bobbermen said in a statement that the Australian seafood industry has lost a good friend with the passing of Ron Boswell.

"He was still a valued mentor to the seafood industry at the time of his death," David said. "From his involvement with the industry in facilitating the sale of the Queensland Fish Board in the mid-1980s, through to gaining more than \$200 million in compensation for industry after the rezoning of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park in 2004 to fighting against planned unreasonable fishing bans in 2012, he always had the best interests of professional and recreational fishers and their families at heart. Ron Boswell is deeply mourned by the Australian seafood industry."

Ron Boswell was driven by a deep religious faith to do good deeds, a politician of conviction, someone very special. Words cannot do him justice.

It might be appropriate to end with the words Ron used himself when farewelling his Senate colleagues in 2014: "Ultimately, politics is about the power to endure. I go from this place undefeated, at a time of my own choosing, the sixth longest-serving member of the Senate. I will end with these words of Saint Paul: 'My time of departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have run the race. I have kept the faith.' Thank you very much. God bless and goodbye."

Martin Bowerman

## In his own words

RON Boswell's 320-page book of recollections of politics – *Ron Boswell: Not Pretty But Pretty Effective* – is available online for \$39.95. Go to: <https://www.connorcourtpublishing.com.au/>

Video of his farewell speech in the Senate is available at: <https://australianpolitics.com/?s=boswell>



Ron Boswell talking to Cairns fishermen about management of the Torres Strait trawl fishery.

# WA BANS REVERBERATE ROUND THE NATION

## Prime fish reallocated to elite anglers

**The Western Australian Government has permanently banned commercial fishing for demersal species along more than 900 km of coastline and reallocated to recreational boat anglers hundreds of tonnes of prime fish previously belonging to seafood consumers.**

COMMERCIAL fishermen licensed to operate in the region were informed by media release on December 3 that their fishing rights there would be terminated in 28 days.

What is known as the West Coast region – stretching from Augusta in the south past Perth to Kalbarri in the north – was closed to all boat fishing for demersal species, except charter fishing, on January 1. After 21 months (September 2027), it will be re-opened to recreational fishing but remain permanently closed to commercial fishing. The Government has imposed a compulsory buyback of commercial fishing licences.

Also, the commercial catch quotas in three of the other four fishing zones round the State have been cut by 50 per cent. Shark fishing has been banned in the West Coast region (because of a small demersal scalefish bycatch.) Trawling for demersal fish by commercial operators has been banned permanently in the Pilbara, the only zone in WA where it occurred.

While the fishing closure is explained as helping the recovery of iconic demersal species such as dhufish and pink snapper, the permanent ban on commercial fishing is a straightforward transfer of fish resources from seafood consumers to recreational anglers.

WA Premier Roger Cook said in the December 3 media release: “These are difficult decisions to make, but they are the right thing to do. We want our kids and grandkids to be able to enjoy fishing in our beautiful State into the future. Our iconic demersal fish species like dhufish and snapper are on the verge of extinction in some parts of WA, so we need to take urgent action to save them for the future generations of fishers.”

Fisheries Minister Jackie Jarvis said: “I know these new recovery measures and impending recovery closure of the West Coast Zone will be strongly felt across the board by fishers and industry, as well as businesses, coastal communities and consumers. Sustainability is of paramount importance and, after carefully considering the feedback from stakeholders and all the available management options, these tough measures are the only way to give our fish the best chance of recovery.”

The speed and brutality of the commercial fishing bans and cuts shocked the WA seafood community and reverberated through fishing and related businesses round the country. Although blatant transfers of fish resources from seafood consumers to angling elites have occurred in most jurisdictions in recent years – including Victoria, the Northern Territory and, particularly, Queensland – the barefaced nature of the WA action still had the power to shock.

In WA, protests were immediate and ranged from the dumping of shark heads at the Fisheries Minister’s electorate office door and a fisherman chaining his boat to the gates of a fisheries department depot to a rally of

fishing families and seafood consumers and Opposition politicians outside Parliament House. Two petitions calling for an inquiry into the WA Government’s action or a pause to implementation of the bans attracted a total of 41,000 signatures.

WA Opposition leader Basil Zempilas supported commercial fishermen, attacked the Government decision and vowed to reverse the ban in government.

Fisheries Minister Jackie Jarvis revealed her motivation for the commercial bans when she posted on Facebook that “Basil Zempilas and the Opposition just voted to destroy recreational fishing. Basil has voted to reverse Labor’s decision to create an exclusive recreational fishing zone in the West Coast Region – he’s the enemy of recreational fishers.”

The view that the main form of science involved in the decision to permanently ban or cut commercial demersal fishing catches throughout most of the State was *political* science was reinforced by Ms Jarvis’ comments on Perth’s Channel 9 news, which reported she accused the Opposition of backing the commercial fishing sector over recreational fishers.

“I’ve made a really tough decision in relation to those 41 boats that are fishing commercially in that (West Coast) zone. I’m not sure if the (Opposition) rally is intended to appease the commercial sector. It appears so. The Opposition have very firmly backed the commercial sector – they have very firmly backed those 41 boats over the 130,000 recreational fishers.”

Western Australian Fishing Industry Council (WAFIC) CEO Melissa Haslam said they 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 per cent bycatch of demersal fish. This level of bycatch is incidental in the grand scheme of things but, again, is a hit to affordable seafood for West Australians.

Ms Haslam said WAFIC supports sustainable, science-based fisheries management – healthy demersal stocks are essential for future generations and for the fishing families and coastal communities who depend on them. “But the Government’s decision to permanently ban commercial demersal fishing across the West Coast bioregion goes too far, too fast, with



bustling and proud industry in Australia is disappearing before our eyes". "Why were we not proud of being a fishing nation? Is having Australian wild-caught seafood on your dinner plate not worth the hard work needed?" (See Page 22.)

Interviewed for ABC TV's 7.30 program, internationally-renowned Sydney chef Neil Perry said he bought fish from affected WA fisherman Anthony Heslewood and believed the ban was unfair: "I'm supporting Anthony because I believe he is a benchmark sustainable fisherman, not just in WA, in the world."

Mr Perry told reporter

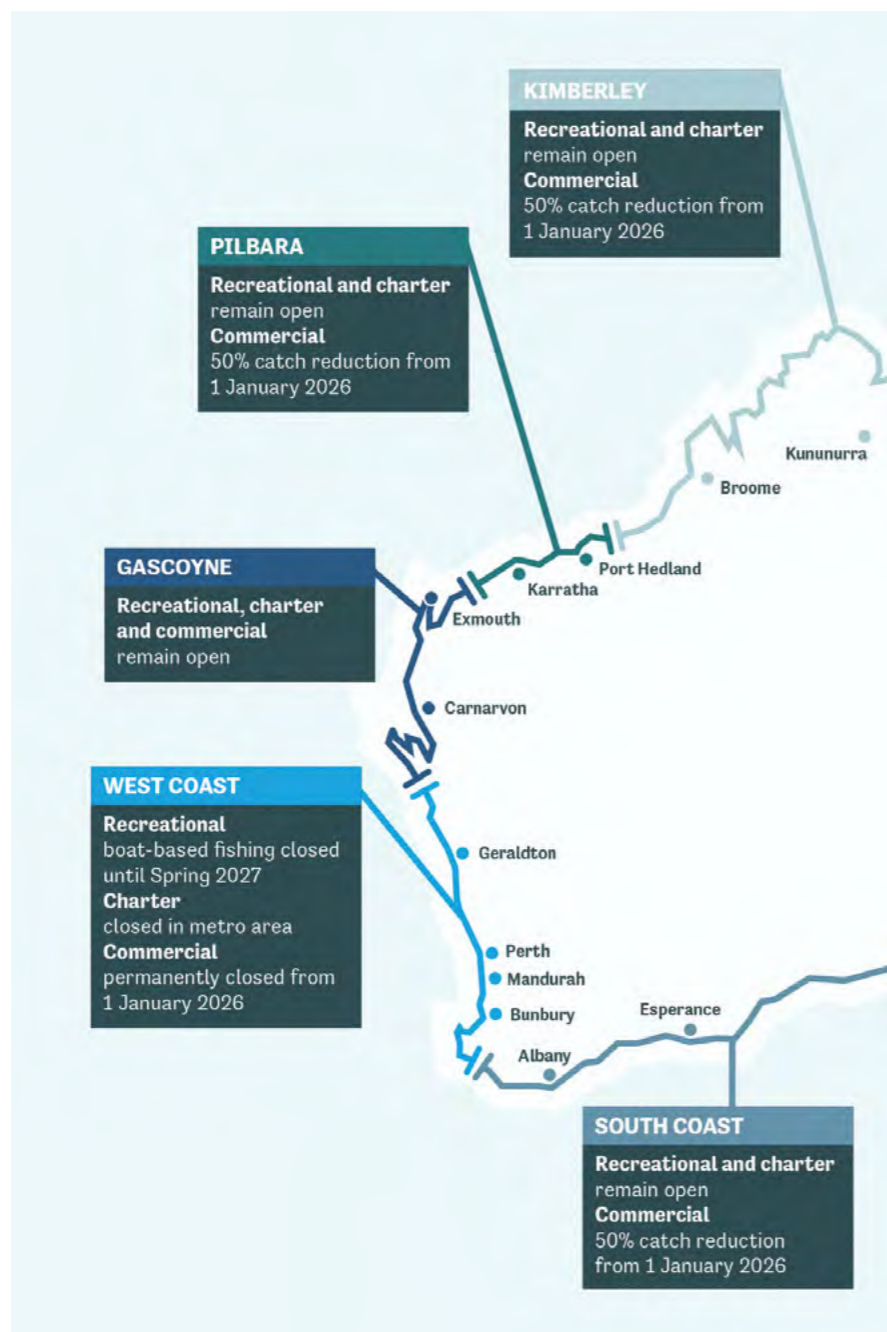
major consequences for WA jobs, regional towns and the local seafood supply chain.

"We're calling for fairness, transparency and genuine consultation. That means a pause on a permanent shutdown, an independent look at the underlying data and assumptions, and a collaborative process to build smarter, adaptive solutions that reduce fishing pressure, protect breeding fish, and keep local, fresh WA seafood available to all West Australians – not just recreational fishers."

In early March, Shadow Fisheries Minister Kirrilee Warr said the Government's refusal to release the documentation underpinning the fishing ban was only deepening distrust across coastal communities. "They want to see the modelling, the data, the economic analysis, the social impact assessments and the departmental advice that led to this decision."

It has also been reported that two companies involved in trawling in the Pilbara – Sea Harvest Pty Ltd and Seafresh Holdings Pty Ltd – have launched legal action in the WA Supreme Court against the Government decision. After an initial hearing, the case was adjourned to early April.

CEO of Mooloolaba Fisheries, Paul Schenk, responded to the WA bans by saying "a once



"I do think that it's very important that we talk about either Australians can't eat wild-caught seafood, or Australians can. But there shouldn't be just a select group of Australians who are allowed to because they call it 'sport'."

Neil Perry

Courtney Bembridge it's not fair that fishermen like Anthony, who prioritises sustainability, are now banned, while recreational fishers will be allowed back in the water in Spring of 2027. "I do think that it's very important that we talk about either Australians can't eat wild-caught seafood, or Australians can. But there shouldn't be just a select group of Australians who are allowed to because they call it 'sport'."

Martin Bowerman

Note: Two men (who are not commercial fishermen) have been fined for trespass and littering over the dumping of shark heads outside the Minister's electorate office; a third man is yet to have his court case finalised.

## More information

FOR the latest information about this ongoing issue, put "WA demersal ban" in your search engine.

Background information from the WA Government: [www.dpird.wa.gov.au/demersal](http://www.dpird.wa.gov.au/demersal)

Debate from the WA Parliament on February 26: <https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/hansard/daily/uh/2026-02-26/8>

The ABC's 7.30 program segment: [Dropping fish numbers trigger controversial fishing bans in WA : ABC iview](https://www.abc.net.au/730/2026-02-26/dropping-fish-numbers-trigger-controversial-fishing-bans-in-wa)



Ironically, a bronze statue in Fremantle Harbour honours the historical contribution of demersal fishermen to the port. (Photos: Alan Kolnik, Dreamstime.com)

## One extra fish

WA Fisheries Minister Jackie Jarvis recently attacked the Opposition in the media, accusing them of backing commercial fishermen: "I've made a really tough decision in relation to those 41 boats that are fishing commercially in that (West Coast) zone. The Opposition have very firmly backed the commercial sector – they have very firmly backed those 41 boats over the 130,000 recreational fishers."

Those 41 commercial boats were meant to catch at least 240 tonnes of fish a year. If we say that 240 tonnes of fish, 240,000 kg, returns fillets weighing half the whole fish, that equates to 120,000 kg of fillets. At a generous 200 grams, or one-fifth of a kilogram, per meal, those 120,000 kg of commercially-caught fillets would produce 600,000 meals for seafood consumers.

Once the zone is re-opened to recreational anglers only in September 2027, that 240 tonnes previously caught by commercial fishermen for seafood consumers will go to the rec fishers.

Now, that 240,000 kg divided between 130,000 anglers equates to approximately 1.8 kg. (That's one point eight, not eighteen.) When you are talking about demersal fish species like dhufish, pink snapper, queen snapper and baldchin groper, that's barely the weight of one fish.

So, Fisheries Minister Jackie Jarvis has taken more than 600,000 meals off the tables of seafood consumers to give anglers barely one extra fish – and not per trip but per year. Does that add up?

And that's not including the 330-tonne shark fishery that has also been taken out – because of its small demersal scalefish bycatch – that would have provided another 800,000 to one million or more meals (and at the more affordably-priced end of the market). Then, there are the hundreds of tonnes or more (the exact figure was not available from DPIRD when this magazine went to press) of demersal fish lost to seafood consumers from the 50 per cent commercial cuts in three other zones. In total, it adds up to millions of high-quality seafood meals lost by seafood consumers every year.

## WA demersal ban means prime fish just for the special few

According to WA Farmers Federation CEO Trevor Whittington, banning the commercial demersal fishery on a long stretch of the coast means taking fish from the many and giving them to a special few.

THE WA Government's demersal "reform" package is not fisheries management: it's fishing for votes at the expense of the two-and-a-half-million West Aussies who never step onto a sports-fishing boat loaded with the latest echo sounders. The rhetoric is heroic, the delivery is sloppy and the consequences fall squarely on the people who don't have a big boat parked in their driveway.

Let's start with the political hype. The Premier wants you to believe WA's snapper and dhufish are "on the verge of extinction". Not "under pressure", not "at risk", not "depleted" – extinction. Anyone who has spent five minutes thinking about the ocean knows that's nonsense. Marine biologists don't use "extinction" for a wild-caught fishery stretched over a thousand kilometres. Dhufish aren't Tasmanian tigers. They are slow-growing, vulnerable and under pressure – but invoking extinction is nothing more than a scare campaign designed to soften up the public for a political decision that ignores the Department of Primary Industries & Regional Development's own advice.

And it is a bad decision — breathtakingly bad. The West Coast Zone will now become an exclusive recreational playground for a small, well-connected slice of the population after a conveniently timed 21-month closure. A miracle of biology so perfectly aligned with the election cycle that only a politician could dream it up.

We're meant to believe that two summers of rest will somehow fix a breeding problem that takes two



decades for dhufish to recover. It's not science: it's political fairy dust – the kind Cabinet hopes will drift gently over the ballot box in 2029.

But here's the most staggering part. Fisheries Minister Jackie Jarvis has wiped out the entire commercial sector on the West Coast – the very people who put local fish on the tables of the 2.5 million West Aussies who don't own a boat. Gone. Bought out. Handed over. All so the Government can tell the 10,000 hunter-killer rec fishers with their high-powered toys that they "saved the dhufish", while quietly gifting them exclusive access to 1,000km of coastline.

Nothing in the Premier's speech mentioned the mums and dads who rely on commercial fishers because they can't – or simply don't want to – chase dhufish or snapper halfway to Africa. Instead, we get the Government's Marie Antoinette moment: "Let them eat basa". Imported. Frozen. Cheap. Welcome to the future: Local Fish for the Few.

Meanwhile, the so-called "recovery closure" for recreational fishers isn't a penalty – it's a two-year holiday.

And when they tow their boats north – because of course they will – the Government knows exactly what's coming. That's why they've quietly halved the commercial catch in the Pilbara, Kimberley and Gascoyne. Not because stocks are failing but because thousands of Perth boats are about to hit regional towns like a Biblical plague. And wait for the pub arguments when the locals realise their fishing grounds have been sacrificed to keep the metro vote happy. No doubt the local tyre shops will do a roaring trade. This is what the Government calls "science-led management."

Then comes the enforcement joke. The same Government that has cut the budget of the Department of Primary Industries & Regional Development (DPIRD) year after year now expects the agency to enforce real-time rec catch reporting, enforce spatial closures, run tag systems, check boat limits and oversee buybacks – with no new money.

The Auditor-General warned back in 2022 that DPIRD couldn't enforce the existing recreational rules or even work out how much the rec sector was actually catching. Nothing in this package fixes that. It simply adds more rules to a system that can't enforce the ones it already has.

And here's the bit no-one in Cabinet wants to say out loud. When the West Coast Zone reopens to rec fishers in 2027, the stocks will not have recovered – not even close. With WA adding 60,000 people a year to its population – including hundreds more future hunter-killers – and with the commercial sector gone, the only option left will be to shut



down the rec sector properly. Not a two-year holiday, but permanent closures.

And this is where the new alliance of the rec fishing lobby group Recfishwest with the Greens will come home to bite them. The Greens were instrumental in convincing the Minister to axe the northern trawl fishery – a fishery not under stock threat and responsible for much of WA's affordable fresh fish. But the rec lobby shouldn't kid themselves. The Greens don't do "temporary." Their endgame is full closure of the West Coast Zone. When you start swimming with the Greens, don't be surprised when they decide you're the next bycatch.

This isn't a recovery plan. It's a plan put forward by a Minister out of her depth – unable to understand or unwilling to follow the scientific advice – backed by a Government that still hasn't worked out who the real problem is. Spoiler alert: it's not the commercial fishers. It's not the dinghy fishers. It's not the beach fishers. It's the high-tech hunter-killers – who you'd assume a Labor Government wouldn't be

bending over backwards to please – yet here we are.

And in the end, the public will pay for it the only way they can – at the fish counter, staring at \$100/kg dhufish that only a tiny metro elite will ever get to eat.

No doubt the Government won't return to test the waters on how this "cunning plan" worked out until well after the next election.

### Postscript

The total demersal catch across WA – recreational and commercial combined – is roughly 3,000 tonnes. Break that down and it's about 1 kg per person per year for our nearly 3 million residents. Under the Minister's new regime, that 3 million kilograms is being carved up in a way that defies logic: around 2 million kg for the 10,000 "hunter-killer" high-intensity rec fishers, and the remaining 1 million kg shared between 700,000 beach, dinghy and occasional fishers – plus the 2 million non-fishers who also own the resource.

Recfishwest will no doubt deny this split but the Minister

needs to explain why she thinks it's fair that the non-fishing majority hand most of their share of a valuable, limited public resource to the handful who flogged the West Coast Zone in the first place.

The rational options were obvious: (1) shut the West Coast demersal fishery for 10 years – for everyone – keeping all licences intact and rebooting only once stocks recovered; or (2) cut the total allowable catch proportionally across all sectors, even if that meant reducing today's catch by a third.

Instead, the Minister chose the worst possible outcome: remove the commercial sector permanently and gift their share to the recreational side – a small minority who vastly outfish the 700,000 ordinary, low-impact occasional fishers they claim to represent.

Note: Trevor Whittington is Chief Executive Officer of the Western Australian Farmers Federation (WAFarmers), and between 2008 and 2017 was an advisor to WA politicians, including (Liberal) Fisheries Minister Norman Moore.

# Enjoy wild-caught seafood ... while you can

A ONCE bustling and proud industry in Australia is disappearing before our eyes. And, as a result, all seafood prices are set to rise due to an expelled fishing industry.

I am a chef and travelled the world as a chef for 25 years, running some of the largest and most exclusive five-star kitchens on the planet. I proudly used Australian products in general as much as I could. I travelled to every single fish market in every country I lived in or visited; in some countries, it was a weekly visit. I had to know what was local and what was available when and where. I saw fishing practices directly in each country. I asked questions all the time. And I actually really enjoy fishing myself and fished in some wild places.

I have come back to Australia and have run this great company, Mooloolaba Fisheries, for the last three-and-a-half years and I am wondering "What have we done?" Apart from New Zealand, we have the best practices in the world, and we are pretty much the only place that actually really talks about sustainable fishing, let alone have processes in place on every level. And still we have stopped this opportunity that was so obviously good.

As of the 1st of January, the Western Australian Government put a permanent ban on commercial fishing for demersal species along a great length of its coast and catch reductions on other parts of the WA coastline. Firstly, our best wishes go out to all the hard-working fishermen and women, their families and any other businesses attached to the fishing industry, right at Christmas time and with little to no notice.

What is a lifelong fisherman supposed to do now? Imagine, with no consultation, someone walking in and telling you your

lifelong job and career is being pulled. That is the thanks we give them. The result of this is you will not be able to lure fishermen back when we need them again: they will never trust the system and what everyone needs to understand is that this takes generations to learn and be good at commercial fishing. Fathers used to pass their skills and knowledge down to their kids. Only one fisherman I know has a son working under them today. A local legend fisherman told me just yesterday: "I would not be so stupid as to have my kids working in the fishing industry. It used to be so great."

The WA Government have told us that certain species are being over-fished, hence the closure. Every single fisherman would tell you that in the last couple of years the fishing has not been better and they for sure would have supported working together on any solution to move forward.

This does not just affect Western Australia: the entire country relies on fish coming from WA just like WA relies on fish coming from the east coast. As of January 1st, more restrictions go into Northern Territory gillnetting. So, no more barramundi or threadfin salmon from the Northern Territory. As of January 1st, the NSW Government has expanded the ban on raw prawn fishing in the Clarence River indefinitely: no more raw prawns for bait. There is another ban in South Australia around the algal blooms (though this seems fair and with reason). People are putting a petition together in NSW to stop fishing around a cod habitat ... It goes on and on.

We are putting more restrictions on gillnetting in Queensland because UNESCO, from its office in Paris, has told Australia that, to keep the Great Barrier Reef off the "endangered" list, you need to stop gillnetting anywhere near



the Reef to protect dugongs and turtles. So, Australia said "Yes, we will stop this."

The cost of seafood in general has gone up recently. Just yesterday, another two species of seafood went up in price. When we have little to no seafood of our own, the price of wild-caught Australian seafood will go up more by the month. Then that will drive up higher prices for your imported seafood. Price rises have been driven by successive State and Federal Governments picking off fishing fleets and fishing grounds around Australia for the last 30 years.

Here at Mooloolaba Fisheries, we pride ourselves on buying and selling Australian wild-caught seafood. We are in a unique position, where we own a wharf and have 26 commercial boat moorings, so we deal with local fishermen every day. We also buy seafood from all over Australia and there is no doubt, in terms of range of seafood, we buy the largest range. We are also one of the largest processors in Australia. Sourcing Australian wild-caught seafood is just becoming more difficult by the day.

I see and talk about Australian wild-caught seafood every day. This is what I have chosen to do since coming back to Australia three years ago. We buy seafood from all over Australia daily and this is all sold by us to Aussie families. The reason we buy from all over Australia is that, for a large majority of species of fish in Queensland, there are very few commercial fishermen. The

fisheries have all been closed off over the years, with local, State and Federal Governments targeting one area at a time.

Nothing is more organic than catching a fish from the ocean and eating it. When was the last time you ate something 100 per cent from nature without any human intervention? Why were we not proud of being a fishing nation? Is having Australian wild-caught seafood on your dinner plate not worth the hard work needed? ("Hard work" meaning all working together and managing everyone's expectations for a result that suits all.)

Sixty-five per cent of all of our seafood in Australia is imported and this is purely because of price. The irony is that, now we have expelled our fishing industry, imports are about to rise sharply and, in the long term, will cost us far more to eat seafood – and we have no idea of how it was caught in foreign countries.

Basa is now one of the highest sold fish in Australia. "Basa" is a nice name for a bottom-dwelling catfish from the Mekong River (a highly-polluted, massive river with raw sewage in Thailand). Comes in a shiny packet and looks good. White meat – no real flavour. Cheap price: undercuts our fishermen on price; we cut the fishermen out; they then drive the price up; and we then can't get our fishermen to go back and fish.

The same thing is happening with our prawns. Cheaper farmed imported product is flooding our markets and undercutting our prawns. The cycle will continue and destroy this fishery also. We have not learned anything.

Only a couple of fisheries are safe for now and one of them is tuna – extremely well managed from Australia's end. No-one is doing a better job than us. There is also greater international co-ordination on tuna, a pelagic species that swim round the world.

The sad reality is that we are actually now looking at foreign

seafood and farmed seafood which is simply not acceptable but it would be naive if we continue with our philosophy.

My intention of this message is to simply let people know what is going on, because I am in a very unique role, seeing and hearing what I do and having the background I have. I love Australian seafood: always have and always will.

And politicians from all parties over the years, especially those that have made decisions against the industry, shame on you for not choosing the hard but better long-term option of finding solutions and working together. It is easy but lazy to say no and close the door.

If all of the above is true, then the \$830-million Sydney Fish Market will be used mostly for defrosting foreign fish or selling it frozen ... but I guess it will have some nice restaurants and eateries.

In July, Australia rolls out the "country of origin labelling" for all seafood in restaurants, etcetera. It's going to create a few new Government jobs in someone's department. It will cost more money for small businesses, as it is another Government initiative to manage with time and money. I worry it will not change a thing. This should have been done years ago. I went to an opening of a big local pub here on the Sunshine Coast last year. Not once does this pub even mention where the seafood comes from. You would have thought this is a great opportunity to promote and support local. I can tell you, the calamari was from China, the barra was farmed, prawns from Vietnam. Imagine this on the Sunshine Coast: we have the best reputation for prawns in the country but that pub is not willing to leverage this.

In the meantime, appreciate and enjoy Australia's wild-caught seafood while you can, but also understand the price that comes with it.

**Paul Schenk**  
**Mooloolaba Fisheries**

## EVENTS

### Fishing and Seafood Industry Action Plan meetings

Dates have been set by the Department of Primary Industries for industry meetings about development of its Fishing and Seafood Industry Action Plan (FSIAP).

Industry members interested in attending should fill in a form via [Expression of Interest: Queensland Fishing and Seafood Action Plan Regional Forum – Fill in form](#)

The locations and dates are:

Yeppoon	15 April
Gold Coast	21 April
Mackay	28 April
Townsville	29 April
Cairns	30 April

Further information: David Bobbermen, QSIA 0417 631 353.

### Seafood Directions

The Seafood Directions national conference is held every two years and the next is at the International Convention Centre in Sydney from 28 to 30 July 2026.

The conference brings together stakeholders from across the seafood supply chain to discuss key issues, innovations and opportunities shaping the future of the industry, with a program of keynote speakers, expert panels, hands-on workshops and networking opportunities.

Highlights include the National Seafood Industry Awards and a behind-the-scenes tour of the new Sydney Fish Market.

Further information: <https://seafooddirections.com.au/>

Note: If you have an upcoming event you would like to tell the Queensland seafood industry about, email details to "EVENTS" at [mobo2@live.com](mailto:mobo2@live.com)

# Victoria's destruction of inshore net fishery fails to lure anglers

**The Victorian Government's \$81-million plan to attract one million people to recreational fishing has failed spectacularly, with angling licences in fact falling by almost 55,000 since the campaign began. And that's despite removal of commercial net fishers from all but one of the State's major bays and inlets.**

THE embarrassing figures for the Victorian Government have been revealed in a special article in the State's *Weekly Times* newspaper.

*Weekly Times* journalist Peter Hunt reported that "The State Government's plan to attract one million recreational anglers has flopped, with licence sales plummeting by almost 55,000 since the strategy launched."

He said the failure of the Victorian Government's \$81-million bid to lift the number of recreational anglers was revealed in its own accounts.

"Rather than attracting more anglers to the State's rivers and marine waters, the Victorian Recreational Fishing Licence Trust Accounts show recreational licence sales have dropped from 300,411 in 2011-12 to 271,395 in 2016-17 and 245,147 in 2024-25.

"Of those sold in 2024-25, just 33,530 were three-year licences, with the bulk made up of 100,235 one-year and 102,260 three-day licences, with another 9,122 people taking out 28-day licences."

Mr Hunt added: "Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) Executive Director Travis Dowling and his team did not respond to a question on why the Target One Million strategy had failed."

The Target One Million campaign was launched by then Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews in late 2014, shortly after the election of the Andrews Labor Government, with the aim to grow participation to one million anglers by 2020.

Key components included halting commercial netting in Port Phillip Bay (Melbourne) and Corio Bay (Geelong) over eight years, banning netting at the mouths of rivers in the Gippsland Lakes, and increasing fish stocking to five million fish a year, including marine fish species.

The Government's description of the Target One Million campaign said it was committed to a phase-out of all commercial netting of Port Phillip Bay over an eight-year period beginning from the Government's election in late 2014. "The net buyback is an essential component of improving recreational fishing within Port Phillip Bay and

increasing the number of anglers within Victoria to one million," it said.

The larger bay and inlet fisheries in Victoria include: Western Port; Port Phillip Bay; Corner Inlet / Nooramunga; and the Gippsland Lakes. Commercial netting was phased out in Western Port in 2009, in Gippsland Lakes in 2020 and in Port Phillip Bay in 2022. Limited net-fishing continues in Corner Inlet / Nooramunga.

The Victorian Government spent \$46 million of taxpayers' money on its Target One Million plan and a further \$35 million on a related "Go Fishing Victoria" plan. The Victorian Fisheries Authority says on its website that actions under the "Go Fishing" plan included: "Phase out commercial fishing in the Gippsland Lakes through a compulsory buyout to give the Lakes back to recreational anglers, boost tourism and create jobs."

The Victorian Fisheries Authority (VFA) continues to promote the net-fishing bans. For example, in a media release last October – about snapper fishing – VFA said: "With commercial nets removed from Port Phillip ... it's a great time to be enjoying the sunshine and catching a fresh feed of fish." In January, in a media release about King George whiting in Port Phillip, a VFA spokesman said: "The quality of fishing overall has been outstanding since we removed all commercial net fishing in the Bay in 2022." And in a statement in February about stocking hatchery-reared dusky flathead, VFA highlighted that 10,000 fish had gone into "the net-free Gippsland Lakes at Lakes Entrance".

Last May, in announcing staff cuts from 192 to 157, the Victorian Fisheries Authority said in part that some of the cuts came from "reducing our current staffing profile on Port Phillip Bay to reflect the removal of the 700-tonne commercial net fishery ...". In other words, from Port Phillip Bay alone, 700 tonnes of seafood was transferred from seafood consumers to a small percentage of recreational anglers.

However, transferring most popular fish species in Victorian bays and inlets from commercial net fishers – and from seafood consumers –

**Go Fishing Victoria**  
*More people fishing, more often*



*Despite expensive Government campaigns, more than 10 years on Victoria actually has fewer people fishing less often – but with the most skilful handful of anglers now able to catch even more fish than before.*

to recreational anglers, has not translated into increased numbers taking up the sport. In fact, as the figures show, at least 55,000 people have left recreational fishing over that time.

In 2012-13, the population of Victoria was 5.65 million, and in June 2025 it was 7.07 million. So, the number of anglers fell by 55,000 at a time when the

population of the State rose by 1,420,000 people.

Even if angler numbers simply grew in the same proportion as the Victorian population, the number of anglers should in fact have grown by 75,000 to 375,000. So, at just 245,000, the number of anglers is 130,000 less than it should be, given the State's population growth, and nowhere near the one

## Background to bans

FOR background to the Victorian net-fishing bans – and the push for more bans elsewhere in Australia, particularly Queensland – go to the link below and watch a 40-minute segment, "Fishing for Votes", from the ABC's Landline program in November 2016, approaching a decade old but still timely.

Host Pip Courtney introduced the story from reporter Sean Murphy by saying: "Australians don't eat enough fish as part of a healthy diet. There's not enough local seafood available to fill our plates, so we're

importing nearly 80 per cent of what we eat. At the same time, sustainable, Australian fisheries are being closed; State Governments are siding with the increasingly vocal recreational fishing sector to stop commercial fishing in some waters, so amateurs can exclusively enjoy a day wetting a line."

[https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/programs/landline/2016-11-19/fishing-for-votes/8042152?utm\\_campaign=abc\\_news\\_web&utm\\_content=link&utm\\_medium=content\\_shared&utm\\_source=abc\\_news\\_web](https://www.abc.net.au/news/rural/programs/landline/2016-11-19/fishing-for-votes/8042152?utm_campaign=abc_news_web&utm_content=link&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_source=abc_news_web)

## Museum piece

NET fishing in the Gippsland Lakes is now confined to memories in a museum at an old slipway in Lakes Entrance. It is featured in an episode, "Gippsland Lakes", in the latest series of the ABC TV show *Back Roads*. You can find it via this link: [S11 Gippsland Lakes, VIC : ABC iView](#)

The segment includes an interview with fourth-generation Gippsland Lakes fisherman Harry Mitchelson. "It was a perfect, beautiful lifestyle," Harry says. He adds it was "devastating" when net-fishing was banned, and "very emotional".

Host Lisa Millar says of the museum that "honouring the culture has gone some way to mending the hurt". Some way, perhaps, but looking into Harry Mitchelson's eyes, you could think maybe not a long way.

million anglers the Government wanted.

And, for this, multi-generational fishing families have been forced out of the industry, related sectors impacted, and six million Victorian seafood consumers denied access to large quantities of the State's most popular eating fish.

## Who benefits?

So, who has benefited from the transfer of most of Victorian snapper, whiting, dusky flathead and other popular food species from seafood consumers to anglers?

Well, as is so often the case, the main beneficiaries are obviously the keen anglers who always take the majority of the recreational catch and lobby hardest for commercial fishing bans. Their skill and frequency of fishing would have meant they were taking the majority of the recreational catch before the fishing bans and, likewise,

they will be catching the majority of the increased share of fish now available.

To fish recreationally in Victoria requires an angling licence for anyone between the ages of 18 and 70; that is approximately 66 per cent of the Victorian population, or 4.6 million people. The 245,000 who hold an angling licence represent a little over 5 per cent of eligible Victorians.

The most committed and enthusiastic anglers – those who have bought a three-year licence – at 33,530 in total, represent fewer than 1 per cent of eligible Victorians. (The exact figure is around 0.73 per cent.)

It is accepted that a small minority of anglers take the majority of recreationally-caught fish. This was fleshed out in a 2018-21 research project funded by the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation (FRDC). The results were published in 2023 and showed that, nationally, around 10 per

## Commercial catch

VICTORIA now has the lowest seafood production value of any Australian State and the Northern Territory. The gross domestic product (GDP) figure for seafood in the State is estimated at \$359 million. (For reference, the GDP for Queensland seafood is \$2,000 million.)

cent of recreational fishers apply around 47 per cent of recreational fishing effort.

Breaking the figures down further, the 1.4 per cent of anglers fishing 52 or more days a year apply 11.8 per cent of fishing effort, the 2.2 per cent of anglers fishing 30 to 51 days a year apply 14.1 per cent of effort, the 1.4 per cent of anglers fishing 20 to 29 days a year apply 5.6 per cent of effort, and the 5.7 per cent of anglers fishing 15 to 19 days a year apply 15.5 per cent of fishing

effort. Bottom line: a minority of anglers are responsible for the majority of angling effort and it's fair to predict they also take a majority of the recreational catch.

Millions of Victorians now have significantly reduced access to prime table fish, while the relative handful of Victorians previously taking most of the recreational haul of fish can now catch even more. Courtesy of buyouts funded by the vast majority of Victorian taxpayers who now have less access to fresh local seafood, the best anglers have more fish to catch and fewer other anglers to compete with – their lobbying campaign against commercial fishing has worked out better than they could have dreamed.

Note: To read the FRDC-funded report on recreational fishing, go to: [https://www.frdc.com.au/sites/default/files/products/2018-161-NRFS\\_main%20report\\_FINAL\\_19Feb2023.pdf](https://www.frdc.com.au/sites/default/files/products/2018-161-NRFS_main%20report_FINAL_19Feb2023.pdf)

and delivery, working closely with industry, community and government partners to ensure the sector continues to deliver strong economic, environmental and social outcomes for Queensland.

“Leading a workforce of around 240 staff and overseeing a broad portfolio spanning fisheries policy, management, operations and compliance, he provides strategic advice on priority matters and key initiatives including fisheries management reforms,” it says.

## Darren Chester to fisheries

DARREN Chester is the new federal Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries & Forestry, following the resignation of David Littleproud as Nationals leader and election of Matt Canavan to the role.

Speaking after the announcement of The Nationals' revised Shadow Ministry in March, the Victorian-based MP said he was looking forward to working with industry groups and regional communities to increase the focus on improving the resilience, profitability and sustainability of Australia's primary industries.

Mr Chester said he would embark on an Australia-wide tour to meet with industry leaders in their home States and gain a first-hand appreciation of the challenges and opportunities, with a focus on securing key inputs, growing access to markets and reducing costs of production.

“As the Member for Gippsland for 18 years, I have plenty of experience dealing with a diverse range of farmers, commercial fishermen and the forestry sector in my region but I appreciate the problems and solutions are different in every part of Australia,” he said.

## STOP PRESS

### Timetable for parks review

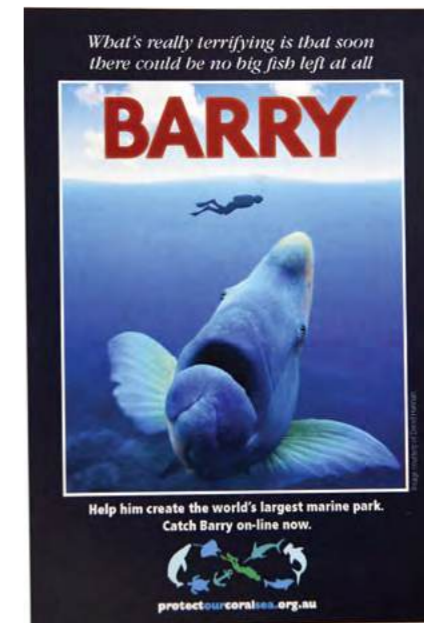
FEDERAL Environment Minister Murray Watt on March 18 posted on LinkedIn news about the review of Commonwealth marine parks and provided a link to a timetable.

“Around a quarter of Australia's ocean is now highly protected from extractive industries but our Government has committed to reach 30 per cent by 2030,” Senator Watt said. “This is critical to sustain our magnificent ocean biodiversity in the face of climate change, as well as sustaining the industries and jobs that rely on our ocean.”

The timetable details on the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water (DCCEEW) website say that Parks Australia is preparing to review management plans for four Australian Marine Park networks and the Coral Sea Marine Park. These plans expire on 30 June 2028 and cover 44 marine parks in total.

The DCCEEW website says: “The Australian Government has committed to protecting 30 per cent of Australia's marine environment in highly protected zoning (IUCN 1a and II) by 2030 in support of global targets for biodiversity conservation. This will be undertaken in consultation with stakeholders. The review is the primary opportunity to achieve this target. To meet the commitment, a further 523,980 square kilometres will need to be granted highly-protected status, in addition to the current 2.2 million sq km. For more information on achieving 30 by 30, please visit [Achieving 30 by 30 - DCCEEW](https://www.dcceew.gov.au/achieving-30-by-30).”

“Engagement plans will be developed in 2026 to support participation of key marine sectors in the review process. The first step of the broader review process is an independent evaluation of how the 2018-2028 management plans have been implemented across the four Australian



In 2008-10, the Pew Charitable Trusts funded a multi-million-dollar campaign to have the entire 989,836 square-kilometre Coral Sea region declared a “no-take” marine park. “Barry the Talking Wrasse” starred in TV and print advertisements as part of the campaign.

Marine Park networks and the Coral Sea Marine Park.”

It says ORIMA Research has been chosen to deliver the independent evaluation and will conduct consultations in the first half of 2026. The final reports are anticipated in late May 2026. (To see more about ORIMA, go to <https://orima.com.au/> To find out more about the evaluation or to participate, contact ORIMA at: [independentevaluation@orima.com](mailto:independentevaluation@orima.com))

To read more about the review process and timetable, go to the DCCEEW website at: <https://lnkd.in/g9EfxPNB>

Minister Watt also linked an article published in *Guardian Australia* that he posted “tells you a bit more about what's going on”.

The article says in part: “The federal environment minister, Murray Watt, has pledged to put an extra half a million square kilometres of Australia's ocean out of reach of fishers and drillers in a step conservationists hope will ‘right the wrongs’ of an Abbott-era downgrade of marine protection.”

It continued: “Watt told *Guardian Australia* the process was a ‘major priority for our government this term’ and said

he wanted to avoid the ‘culture wars’ ignited by the Abbott government before marine park maps were redrawn in 2018.”

The *Guardian* article quoted representatives of WWF Australia, the Pew Charitable Trusts and the Marine Futures Lab at the University of Western Australia, but no-one from the fishing industry.

To read the article, go to: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/mar/17/australia-environment-murray-watt-ocean-protection-fishers-drillers>

## Ocean legislation

ON March 23, the Senate passed the High Seas Biodiversity Bill 2026, which establishes a framework to implement Australia's obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the Conservation & Sustainable use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction.

Environment Minister Murray Watt announced the news by saying: “We've just passed strong new laws through the Senate to protect the world's oceans. The High Seas Biodiversity Treaty means we can better manage the world's oceans, including those outside of any nation's jurisdiction, and ensure the precious marine life and habitats they host will be around for future generations. It's a critical step towards protecting 30 per cent of the world's coastal and marine areas by 2030 and I'm so proud Australia has signed up for it.”

To learn more about the legislation – and the views of political parties and a number of individual Senators – read the transcript of the debate by searching for “Senate Hansard”, and then click on “March 23”, then “Bills” and then scroll down to “High Seas Biodiversity Bill 2026”. Live link: [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Hansard/Hansard\\_Display?bid=chamber/hansards/29211/&sid=0000](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Hansard/Hansard_Display?bid=chamber/hansards/29211/&sid=0000)

## APPOINTMENTS

### Eddie Jebreen is appointed FQ ED

EDDIE Jebreen has been appointed Executive Director of Fisheries Queensland in the Department of Primary Industries. He had been acting in the role since the departure of former ED Dallas D'Silva in September.

A statement described Mr Jebreen – who holds a Bachelor of Science with first-class honours from the University of Queensland, specialising in fisheries and marine science – as a highly respected public sector leader with more than two decades of experience in fisheries management, natural resource governance and science-led policy development.

“As Executive Director, Eddie is leading Fisheries Queensland through an important period of renewal

# Million-dollar investment “signals new era” for Queensland coral trout industry

**A million-dollar conversion of a former pilchard purse-seiner into Queensland’s most advanced coral trout mother ship represents a significant private investment in the State’s commercial fishing industry.**

THE conversion has been carried out for Cairns-based Vision Fishing Pty Ltd, and Arty Raptis, CEO of its parent company, Blue Reef, recently explained the background to the project.

“This new venture combines the vessel conversion, cutting-edge dory technology and substantial quota holdings – now valued in the multiple millions of dollars – and signals a new chapter for the industry under the Queensland Government’s refreshed approach to commercial fishing,” Mr Raptis said.

He said the 21.35-metre *Emma J*, originally a purse-seiner for pilchard fishing, underwent comprehensive conversion in Port Lincoln by Profab Engineering before making the journey to Queensland waters.

“The vessel’s features for

pilchard-fishing – particularly its large brine capacity and suitable hull design – made it an ideal candidate for conversion to coral-trout fishing, so this was far more than simply shuffling existing vessels between operators without genuine fleet expansion or technological advancement.

“With a Caterpillar 3406 main engine, fresh from an in-frame rebuild in 2023, and with approximately 39,100 litres of total brine-tank capacity, the *Emma J* now has the largest live-fish holding capacity of any vessel in the Queensland coral trout fleet. This capacity, combined with a significantly lower fish-to-water ratio than any other operation in the industry, will keep the live fish in top condition.

“The vessel supports our objective of strengthening domestic seafood production by improving operational capability, safety and

technology on the water,” Mr Raptis said. “This helps ensure a consistent supply of high-quality Queensland seafood while supporting regional jobs and skills.”

As part of the project, five live-trout dories have been crafted by Merino Boatworks in Cairns, based on an existing five-metre design but incorporating a number of innovative features. (These dories will be covered in a separate article in the next edition.)

## Innovation and expansion

He said the *Emma J* and its dory fleet represent a significant level of crew safety and operational standards for the coral trout fishery. “The vessel maintains AMSA NSCV Class 3B certification for six crew and has undergone comprehensive stability analysis to ensure safe operations under all anticipated loading conditions.

“A detailed stability booklet prepared by GN Marine of Port Adelaide documents loading conditions from lightship through to full operational departure, with all scenarios demonstrating compliance with stringent NSCV stability criteria. The brine tanks have been reconfigured and are maintained at 100 per cent capacity during operations to ensure optimal stability characteristics, while the vessel’s substantial freeboard provides additional safety margins.”

The operation will be complemented by an innovative provenance project that will allow consumers to identify exactly where their fish was caught and by whom, providing complete supply chain transparency and further strengthening the premium market positioning.

Mr Raptis said Vision Fishing represented a new model for commercial fishing operations in Queensland. “This is a collaboration between experienced fishing boat operators, commercial fishing trading companies, quota holders, and agricultural specialists from diverse fields. This cross-pollination of expertise from various agricultural sectors brings fresh perspectives to traditional fishing operations.

“The *Emma J* is just the beginning of Vision Fishing’s ambitious expansion plans. We intend to grow our fishing fleet significantly, extending operations from Mackay all the way to the northern reaches of the State’s waters. This geographic expansion will be supported by continued investment in purpose-built or appropriately converted vessels.”

He added that the change in attitude towards the commercial fishing industry since the LNP had come to government in Queensland had encouraged the investment in this new venture.

“For example, the State Government’s removal of the investment-warning status



Blue Reef CEO Arty Raptis.

from the fishery and changes aimed at creating a more cohesive relationship between the Department of Primary Industries and commercial fishermen have been crucial.

“This policy shift has had practical impacts on project financing. The *Emma J* investment was made possible through a combination of private funding and institutional lending, with the changed government stance making it considerably easier for operators to access capital for significant fleet investments. National Australia Bank provided corporate lending facilities specifically structured to support the project, reflecting the financial sector’s renewed confidence in Queensland fisheries under

the reformed regulatory environment.

“The investment aligns closely with the Queensland Government’s new Fishing and Seafood Action Plan and the broader Primary Industries Prosper 2050 initiative. We have confidence in the long-term sustainability and growth of Queensland’s commercial fishing sector, and I think the Plan’s focus on modernisation, efficiency and supply chain resilience is reflected through this private investment in new, purpose-built vessels and technology. Let’s hope it’s a sign of good things to come for the industry.”

Further information: [www.blureef.au](http://www.blureef.au) and [www.merinoatworks.com](http://www.merinoatworks.com)



Former pilchard purse-seiner Emma J undergoing conversion to a coral trout mother ship.

## New longliner for WA’s Austral

WESTERN Australian-based Austral Fisheries has commissioned its new flagship longliner, *Austral Odyssey*. An Austral spokesman said the purpose-built 68.55-metre vessel – from the Norwegian shipyard Baat-

bygg AS – marks both a technological and strategic investment in the Heard Island and McDonald Islands toothfish fishery. Further information: <https://austral.com.au/sustainability/news/>



Austral Odyssey beginning her maiden voyage.

# Video interviews with net fishers available

VIDEO interviews have been released that document the stories, knowledge and opinions of 21 gillnet fishers from Queensland's east coast and Gulf of Carpentaria, who collectively represent nearly 1,000 years of fishing experience and some of whom garnered the wisdom of multi-generational fishing families.

Conducted in the wake of the 2023 decision by the then Commonwealth and Queensland Governments to phase out gillnet fishing across the Great Barrier Reef (GBR) region, this project serves as a valuable oral history of a rapidly changing sector of the commercial fishing industry, and a commentary on management of commercial fisheries and the marine environment.

The project produced more than eight hours of video and audio interviews, along with over 70,000 words of transcripts. It captures first-hand accounts of environmental change, shifts in fisheries management and public attitudes, and the personal toll of policy changes on individual fishers and communities.

These narratives also reveal a strong sense of pride in providing fresh local seafood and deep emotional connections to marine environments. Key findings include the following.

## Environmental change

Fishers reported significant degradation of inshore habitats, including loss of seagrass, increased siltation from land runoff and destruction of fish habitat. These changes have affected not only target species but also dugong, turtles and other species of conservation interest.

## Social and industry shifts

There is widespread concern among fishers about reduced consultation in management processes and the undervaluing of fishers' ecological knowledge. Many reported a decline



Keith Payne, VC, one of the net fishers interviewed.

in their perceived social standing, often exacerbated by misinformation and hostility on social media.

## Mental health impacts

The sudden closures and regulatory changes have resulted in stress, uncertainty and, in some cases, significant mental health issues among affected fishers. Feelings of betrayal, loss and anxiety about the future were common themes.

## Cultural and economic loss

The phasing out of gillnet fishing is seen as the loss of not only a livelihood but also a way of life. Fishers report that younger generations are increasingly discouraged from entering the industry due to policy instability and lack of viable entry pathways.

## Ongoing value

Despite adversity, fishers expressed enduring passion for their work and pride in their role supplying sustainable local seafood. Many demonstrated adaptive practices, and a willingness to contribute to habitat monitoring and policy development. The report highlights the importance of gathering and valuing the traditional and experiential knowledge of long-serving fishers, espe-

cially in times of rapid change. It underscores the potential for this knowledge to inform future fisheries management, conservation planning and policy development both in Queensland and across Australia.

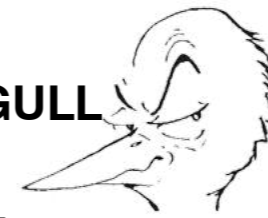
Ultimately, this project gives voice to a proud group of primary producers with a long and rich heritage who have often felt unheard, documenting not just a profession under pressure but also the profound human and cultural dimensions of their relationship with their environment.

Fishers interviewed are: Mark Alexander; Bruce Batch; David Caracciolo; Mario Fazio; Arthur Freeman; Brett Fuchs; Bill Gilliland; Neil Green; Keith Harris; Allan Holland; Eric Lollo; Jenny Lott; Des Moody; John Olsen; Keith Payne; David Perkins; Loris Riley; Greg Savige; David Swindells; Colin Taplin; and Andrew Tobin.

These interviews were conducted with funding from the Fisheries Research & Development Corporation (FRDC). It is FRDC Project 2023-114.

To view the video interviews and transcripts, go to: [www.frdc.com.au/project/2023-114](http://www.frdc.com.au/project/2023-114)

## THE GULL



### Blasphemy

AT the risk of being labelled a blasphemer, I want to say something: David Attenborough is not divine. He's not always right. No matter how sincere his script, no matter how mellifluous his delivery, sometimes he gets it wrong.

For example, in his latest documentary, *Ocean with David Attenborough* – released just ahead of the June 2025 UN Ocean Conference in France to (successfully) impact sentiment about fishing, especially trawling – his voiceover for underwater vision of a trawl net in action talks about “an industrial trawl net destroying nearly everything in its path” ... yet, in fact, there's nearly nothing in its path. It is stirring up some sediment but running across sand, silt and mud.

David Attenborough has form. Remember his 2010 BBC documentary called *Death of the Oceans?* I expect many of the government ministers and others who came away from the 2025 *Ocean* doco saying how much it had influenced them certainly don't remember the version from 15 years earlier.

In *Death of the Oceans?*, he made a number of statements, including “In one of the most disturbing pieces of research, the question was asked, ‘How much longer can our oceans tolerate the present level of commercial fishing?’ The answer was simple and stark: if present trends continue, commercial fishing as we know it will have collapsed by the year 2050.”

This statement was based on a 2006 research paper that had been thoroughly debunked before the *Death* doco went to air (and certainly way before the unrelated Netflix documentary *Seaspiracy* repeated it in 2021). This is just one example; there are many more.

When this remarkable man turns 100 on May 8 this year, I will raise a glass and discuss with my family (who revere him) his wonderful achievements as the world's foremost natural history presenter. However, I will not treat his words as gospel nor encourage anyone to be influenced in their management of our natural resources by his beautifully-intoned but often inaccurate narration.

### World-leading ...

THERE'S been confusion about exactly what level of protection in our waters is intended under the term “30x30” because it seems to be interpreted differently in different jurisdictions. Australia's interpretation looks to be well and truly ahead of the rest of the world.

The term “30x30” is a catchy slogan for an international commitment to see 30 per cent of oceans protected by the year 2030. It is now clear that, in Australia, “30 per cent of oceans protected” is being interpreted as meaning “highly protected”. That includes protected from any fishing. More than 50 per cent of Australian waters are already covered by marine protected areas (MPAs), or marine parks, and 24 per cent are “highly protected”. So, to reach 30 per cent, the areas closed to all fishing would have to be expanded by a quarter.

Other countries don't seem to share Australia's interpretation. For example, nations in the European Union – where much of the drive for 30x30 has originated but where 30 per cent of waters being even protected within MPAs is mostly a distant aspiration – are committed to **only 10 per cent** in what would match Australia's highly-protected category.

The European Union's *EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030* “commits Member States to protect 30 per cent of the EU's land and 30 per cent of its marine areas by 2030, of which 10 per cent must be strictly

protected”. For interest, WWF has calculated that barely 2 per cent of EU seas are currently covered by marine protected areas with management plans

In any case, the current targets might only be temporary goals. The influential International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN, an organisation that directly advises UNESCO) already believes 30 per cent is too small. In a published guide to implementing 30x30 targets, the IUCN says in part: “Evidence suggests that conservation of 30 to 70 per cent or more of terrestrial, inland waters, coastal and marine areas is required to sustain and restore biodiversity. Thirty per cent is therefore a minimum, probably only a provisional goal ...” and “This means that PCA (protected & conserved area) efforts, which may expand in future with a larger target, need to focus on the most urgent needs now.”

What's next? 40x40?

### All for me

JUST when Victorian fishermen might have thought it was safe to go back in the water ... the rec-fishing lobby group down there has published its election wish list and wants to make kingfish an “all for me” rec-only species.

In the recently-published plan, which it is now pitching to the major political parties, VRFish also wants a review of recreational abalone regulations, “with a view to provide more equitable access in Victorian Central Waters”.

Maybe this is to be expected now that commercial fishing is to be managed not by the Agriculture Department, like all the State's other primary producers, but instead in a new department of outdoor recreation.

It never ends, eh.

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