



Operational Guidelines for the West Coast Charter Demersal Finfish Quota Tag System

2025/26 LICENSING PERIOD

Key points

- Changes to charter fishing came into effect 1 July 2023 as part of the strategy to support recovery of demersal fish stocks from Kalbarri to Augusta.
- The tag system for demersal scalefish was implemented as the primary measure to manage the charter sector to its annual recovery benchmark.
- An additional 10 tonnes have been made available to the charter fishery while in recovery, following the outcomes of a buyout of commercial entitlement. This increases the 2025-26 recovery benchmark to 30 tonnes.
- Charter operators are only able to land demersal scalefish ashore in the West Coast Zone if they have been allocated quota tags under the new system or have acquired quota tags from another charter operator that has been allocated tags.
- For the 2025-26 season, 6,977 tags have been allocated across the 33 Fishing Tour Operator Licence (FTOL) holders in the West Coast Zone based on catch history.
- All charter boats can continue to catch a limited number of demersal scalefish for the purpose of providing a meal for those on board as part of a tour, without the need to be in possession or use of quota tags.
- Charter operators who do not have quota tags on board can continue to undertake tours targeting and landing non-demersal species.

Operational guidelines explained

From 1 July 2023, all FTOL holders endorsed to fish in the West Coast Zone require quota tags to land demersal scalefish ashore.

Only Fishing Tour Operator Licence (FTOL) holders that have quota tags on board their charter boat can land **ANY** demersal scalefish ashore in the West Coast Zone. All other relevant recreational fishing rules apply.

All FTOL and Restricted Fishing Tour Licence (RFTOL) holders can continue to catch demersal scalefish for the purpose of providing a meal for those on the boat without being in possession of or having to use quota tags. All other relevant recreational fishing rules still apply.

The operational requirements of the tagging system are explained further below. If you intend to fish for demersal scalefish in the West Coast Zone, please familiarise yourself with these guidelines.

The Quota Tag System – what is permitted?

The table below summarises what fishing activity is permitted depending on what licence you hold and whether or not you have quota tags on board your charter boat.

FISHING ACTIVITY	FTOL WITH TAGS	FTOL WITHOUT TAGS	RFTOL
FISHING FOR NON-DEMERSAL SPECIES (CATCH TO COOK)			
FISHING FOR DEMERSAL SPECIES (CATCH TO COOK) *			
LANDING NON-DEMERSAL SPECIES			
LANDING DEMERSAL SPECIES			

The allocation decision and number of tags available

In the 2025-26 season, **6,977** quota tags have been allocated across the 33 eligible FTOL holders.

This was determined based on the 2024 calendar year data and is consistent with the *Quota Tag Determination and Allocation Method (Fishing Tour Operator's Licence holders in the West Coast Region) 2025-26*.

The formula is outlined below:

$$\text{Number of quota tags} = \frac{A \times B \times C \times D}{E}$$

Where in the 2025-26 calculation:

Variable	Definition	2024 value	Additional information
A	The estimated total fishing mortality of 'quota species' as a percentage of the estimated total fishing mortality of all top 15 demersal finfish species/groups.	0.87	This considers catch composition and accounts for the fact that tags are only used on quota species. In 2024, 87% of the charter total fishing mortality was of quota species.
B	The annual total allowable level of fishing mortality of the top 15 demersal finfish species/groups.	30,000 kgs	Recovery benchmark.
C	The estimated retained fishing mortality of 'quota species' as a percentage of the estimated total fishing mortality (retained +PRM) of 'quota species'.	0.95	This considers that a small number of quota species will be discarded and die post-release. An estimated 95% of total fishing mortality of quota species is estimated to be retained, and 5% is estimated to be post-release mortality.
D	The number of 'quota species' landed as a percentage of the total number of 'quota species' retained (landed and consumed).	0.73	This accounts for the quota species that are retained and consumed on board (i.e. no tags used). In 2024, 27% of quota species were consumed on board and 73% were brought onto land.
E	The estimated average retained weight of 'quota species.'	2.60 kg	

Note: some values have been rounded for simplicity in the table and may not add up to the whole.

Quota species

Quota tags are not species specific and to make the process simple and streamlined for charter operators, only the *relevant demersal finfish* aka 'quota species' need to have a tag attached when landed.

The four 'quota species' are: pink snapper, WA dhufish, baldchin groper and breaksea cod.

All other demersal scalefish species may be landed without having to be tagged, provided the charter boat has tags on board.

Pink snapper



WA dhufish



Baldchin groper



Breaksea cod



Other fishing rules that apply

All recreational fishing rules apply, such as bag, size, and possession limits, and spawning closures. Licensed charter boats are only excepted from the recreational demersal scalefish effort closures and the demersal scalefish boat limit.

For more information, please refer to the current [Recreational Fishing Guide](#).

2025-26 tags

Demersal scalefish quota tags have a secure, tamper-evident locking mechanism to ensure they cannot be re-used. Each tag is printed with details of the licensing period that they are valid for, as well as a unique serial number (refer to image below). For the 2025-26 season, the tags are green with white print; this colour will change on an annual basis. These tags are also longer (11.5 inches) compared to previous seasons' tags (7.5 inches), making them easier to attach to larger fish such as pink snapper and WA dhufish.



Securing tags to quota species

The master of the charter boat is responsible for tagging all quota species that are to be landed. The tag must be attached through the mouth and gill slit (as shown). Should it be required for larger fish, securing the tag through the lip is also acceptable for. To secure the tag, feed the end into the lock chamber and ensure it has clicked into place. These tags are tamper-evident and cannot be re-used.



Reporting tags

The master of the charter boat must record the serial number of each used tag and the details of the relevant quota species in a statutory return prior to the fish being landed ashore. The 6-digit alphanumeric serial number must be recorded in the 'Tag serial numbers' section of the charter boat's statutory logbook

For all landed quota species, a serial number must be present. The only exception to this is for consumed quota species.

Filleting requirements of quota species

If a landed quota species is to be filleted prior to being landed, a locked quota tag must be stored with the fillets. Tags must not be cut and stored with the fillets. It is recommended that the tag not be attached to a whole fish if that fish is intended to be filleted prior to landing.

The fillets, along with the tag, must be stored in a separate container that does not contain any other fish. Two fillets equal one whole fish for the purpose of determining bag limits and tag usage.

Fishing without tags on board

Charter boats operating under an FTOL or an RFTOL can continue to fish for demersal scalefish for the purpose of offering a meal for those on the boat at the time the fish were taken, without having a tag on board.

FTOLs can also continue to fish for and land non-demersal scalefish species in accordance with the relevant rules. This includes nearshore species (e.g., whiting and herring), large pelagic species (e.g., shark, mackerel and tuna), squid, cuttlefish, octopus, and western rock lobster.

Transferring tags

Quota tags may be privately temporarily transferred between FTOL holders regardless of whether a licence holder was originally allocated tags. It is the responsibility of the master of the charter boat to ensure the relevant tag numbers are recorded in the boat's statutory logbook when used.

Frequently asked questions

How long will the demersal scalefish tag system be in place?

The current management arrangements for the recreational, commercial and charter fishing sectors are designed to recover the WCDSR. The use of a physical tag system as the primary measure to manage the charter sector's catch will be reviewed and consideration may be given to transitioning to a digital reporting system in the future.

How long are quota tags valid for?

Quota tags are issued for use during each 12-month licensing period for the charter sector commencing on 1 July 2023. Tags issued for the 2025-26 licensing period are valid from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2026. Unused tags will be forfeited and cannot be carried over into the next licensing period. Each year, the tags will be a different colour and serial numbers will change.

Do tags need to be sent back to DPIRD once fish is landed ashore?

Tags are not required to be sent to DPIRD once landed ashore. Fishers are encouraged to responsibly dispose of tags in an appropriate recycling bin.

How will tags be allocated in future licensing periods?

The tag system will be subject to an annual review process where any operational issues, industry feedback, and future allocation decisions will be considered. Catch and effort behavioural changes will also be assessed as part of this review process and may alter the number of tags available in following licensing periods to continue managing the sector to the recovery benchmark of 30 tonnes.

Can demersal scalefish be eaten on board without using a tag?

FTOL and RFTOL holders in the West Coast Zone are exempt from the tag system for the purpose of consuming the fish on board as part of the tour. This will assist operators in diversifying towards alternative 'catch to cook' eco-fishing tourism experiences.

How do consumed demersal species need to be reported in logbooks?

The master of a charter boat is required to record all fish that were consumed as part of the tour in the new column of the logbook. This is now a statewide requirement for all operators to differentiate between landed and consumed fish.

Can non-quota species of demersal scalefish be landed without being in possession of tags?

No, the master must be in possession of tags to land ANY demersal scalefish.

What is the penalty for reusing tags or landing a demersal scalefish without being in possession of tags?

The maximum penalty is \$5,000.

Will charter licence fees be reviewed?

The licence fee structure for FTOL and RFTOLs are being considered in the statewide strategic charter review. The statewide review will also consider future access to high value areas, management framework alternatives and latent effort.

Will there be a licence buy back?

There is currently no proposal for Government to buy back FTOLs or RFTOLs.

Where can I find more information?

If you have any questions regarding the tag system, please contact the charter management team by email at charter@dpird.wa.gov.au.

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