PROPOSAL FOR WCRLMF ACTIVE FISHERS TO LAND UP TO 50 TAGGED SCALEFISH PER YEAR FOR PERSONAL CONSUMPTION

Thank you for your email dated 19 May 2020 regarding the Western Rock Lobster’s proposal for commercial West Coast Rock Lobster Managed Fishery (WRLMF) active fishers to land up to 50 tagged scalefish per year for personal consumption.

Commercial line fishing access on the West Coast and compensation
Wetline fishing for all commercial fishers operated under open-access arrangements in the West Coast Bioregion prior to 2008. The wetline review undertaken between 2002 and 2007 resulted in the development of access criteria and management arrangements that led to the establishment of the West Coast Demersal Scalefish (Interim) Managed Fishery (WCDSIMF). Ongoing access to the WCDSIMF was determined in accordance with catch history requirements outlined in the West Coast Demersal Scalefish (Interim) Managed Fishery Management Plan 2007 (the Plan). Consistent with the establishment of all managed fisheries in Western Australia, no compensation was payable to commercial fishers who did not meet the access criteria.

In addition to the establishment of the WCDSIMF, the State Government established a Voluntary Fisheries Adjustment Scheme for Fishing Boat Licence (FBL) holders. This provided the opportunity for affected fishers that could no longer use their FBL for wetline fishing to surrender their authorisation and depart the fishing industry.

Recreational fishing from a commercial vessel
Since 2008, the Department and key stakeholder groups have explored the issues around commercial fishers being able to undertake recreational fishing.

In 2011 the Fish Resources Management Regulations 1995 was amended to permit a commercial fisher to hold a recreational fishing licence as long as the recreational fishing activities were not undertaken from a licensed commercial fishing vessel. The Western Australian Fishing Industry Council and Recfishwest support this position.

It is important that there is a clear separation between commercial and recreational fishing activities – both from a compliance and resource access point of view.
Commercial fishers are entitled to hold a recreational fishing licence and to fish recreationally, as long as this activity is not undertaken from a commercial fishing vessel. This includes dinghies and dories associated with a licensed commercial fishing vessel. Presently licensed fishing boats can be “delisted” and “relisted” through the Department’s licensing system. This enables licensed fishing boats to be “removed” from the licensing system for a period of time determined by the operator and subsequently used for other purposes, which may include recreational fishing.

**West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource**

The West Coast Demersal Scalefish Resource (WCDSR) is currently 10 years into a 20-year recovery plan. The current strategy underpinning the recovery of the WCDSR is to manage catches by both the recreational and commercial sectors to 50 per cent of their respective 2005/06 levels (recovery benchmark). The WCDSR is fully allocated under the Integrated Fisheries Management (IFM) Policy with 64 per cent allocated to the commercial sector and 36 per cent allocated to the recreational (including charter) sector.

Currently WCRLMF fishers are able to retain pot caught demersal scalefish for personal consumption. As pot caught demersal scalefish are a by-product of commercial rock lobster operations this catch is monitored against the commercial sector allocation and within the combined 40 tonne recovery benchmark set aside for commercial fisheries other than WCDSIMF. This 40 tonne recovery benchmark was fully utilised in 2018 and 2019, primarily by the Temperate Demersal Gillnet and Demersal Longline Fishery.

Western Rock Lobster’s proposal to allow active WCRLMF vessels to fish recreationally for up to 50 demersal scalefish each year is estimated to generate over 30 tonnes of additional demersal scalefish catch in the West Coast Bioregion. As the catch generated by this proposal is not a by-product of commercial fishing but caught while undertaking recreational fishing, this catch would be monitored against the recreational allocation and recovery benchmark (currently 250 tonnes). In 2017/18 the recreational (including charter) sector WCDSR allocation was fully utilised and catches were exceeding the recreational sector recovery benchmark. As current catches are exceeding recovery benchmarks, there is no scope to increase recreational sector catch of demersal scalefish through the Western Rock Lobster’s proposal as this is likely to impact on the rate of recovery of the WCDSR.

The Department is currently developing a Harvest Strategy for the WCDSR which will be released for consultation in the second half of 2020. The Harvest Strategy will provide a transparent framework to evaluate the recovery of the WCDSR and ensure both sectors appropriately contribute to the recovery of the resource while sharing the available catch.

I would encourage you to contact Mr Shane Walters at the Department on 6551 4366 or at Shane.Walters@dpird.wa.gov.au regarding any further demersal scalefish queries or proposals.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

HON PETER TINLEY AM MLA
MINISTER FOR FISHERIES