



Fisheries science update – October 2022

2020/21 WA Recreational Boat Fishing Survey



Catch the facts about what's being caught in WA

Since 2011 we have carried out this survey every two to three years to compare catches over time. Along with annual commercial and charter fishing catch data, the survey provides information to help us manage our aquatic resources and ensure recreational fishing in WA remains among the best and most sustainable in the world.

More than 8,000 fishers took part in our fifth major boat fishing survey, which continues to be one of the most comprehensive of its kind in Australia.

The innovative format, using log books, boat ramp surveys and remote cameras, has been used to generate catch estimates covering the entire state.

The results of this fifth survey in 2020/21 revealed western rock lobster was the most popular species for the second survey in a row, with about 660,000 caught. School whiting was the most popular finfish for the fifth survey in a row, with about 320,000 caught.

Recreational fishing is a very popular activity in WA, with 620,000 people participating in 2020/21. Fishing avidity (days fished) was concentrated around the Perth metro area, and the regional centres of Bunbury, Busselton and Geraldton.

Fishing effort in 2020/21 was the highest it's been since 2011/12, with more than 1.2 million boat fishing hours and close to 470,000 fishing events completed statewide.

Overall, 2020/21 release rates were lower than in 2017/18, however high release rates were reported for some popular species. For example, 76% of all pink snapper and 65% of all blue swimmer crabs were released.

Most boat fishing occurred in the West Coast Bioregion (Augusta to Kalbarri), where the overall kept catches of prized demersal species was steady in 2020/21 compared with 2017/18, and higher than 2013/14 and 2011/12.

If you bought a Recreational Fishing from Boat Licence – more than 126,000 were issued in 2019/20 – you helped fund this project.

About the survey

The survey of recreational boat-based fishers included:

- A 12-month phone-diary survey providing catch and effort data recorded in fisher's log books
- Surveys of fishers at boat-ramps to collect data on size for key species.
- Remote camera video monitoring of launches and retrievals at key boat ramps.

Participants

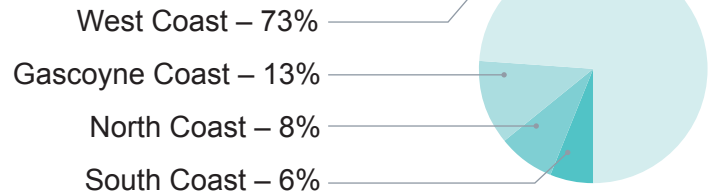
3,044 fishers kept log books and took part in phone-diary surveys

5,398 fishers were interviewed at boat ramps

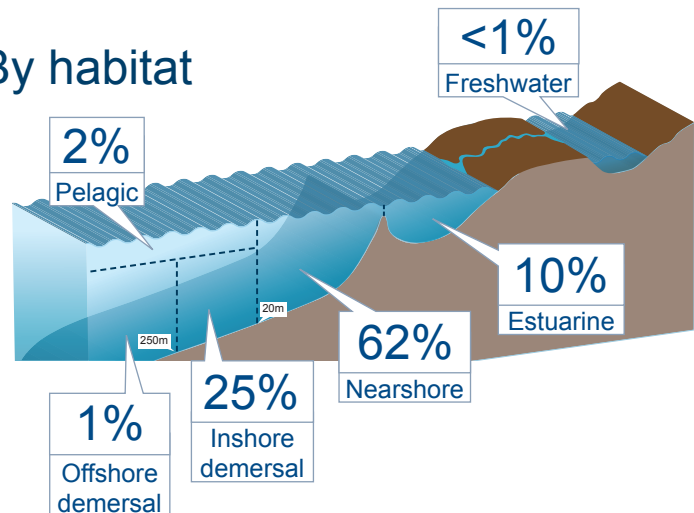
Key findings

Boat-based fishing effort

By bioregion



By habitat



What fishers caught and released

More than **3.03 million** finfish, sharks, rays and invertebrates were caught from **242** different species. More than half the overall catch was kept (52% for finfish and 58% for invertebrates).

Invertebrates

About 45% of the recreational catch was invertebrates (1.37 million), including crustaceans (seven species) and molluscs (six species).

Environmental conditions have a significant impact on recruitment (addition of juvenile crabs to the fishery), which affects the abundance of crabs in different areas.

Recreational fishing estimates for each key crab fishery will be used, with environmental data and other information, to ensure we continue to carefully manage each fishery.

The most commonly caught were:

Western rock lobster



663,000 caught
28% released

Blue swimmer crab



571,000 caught
65% released

Squid



104,000 caught
5% released

Key:

Kept

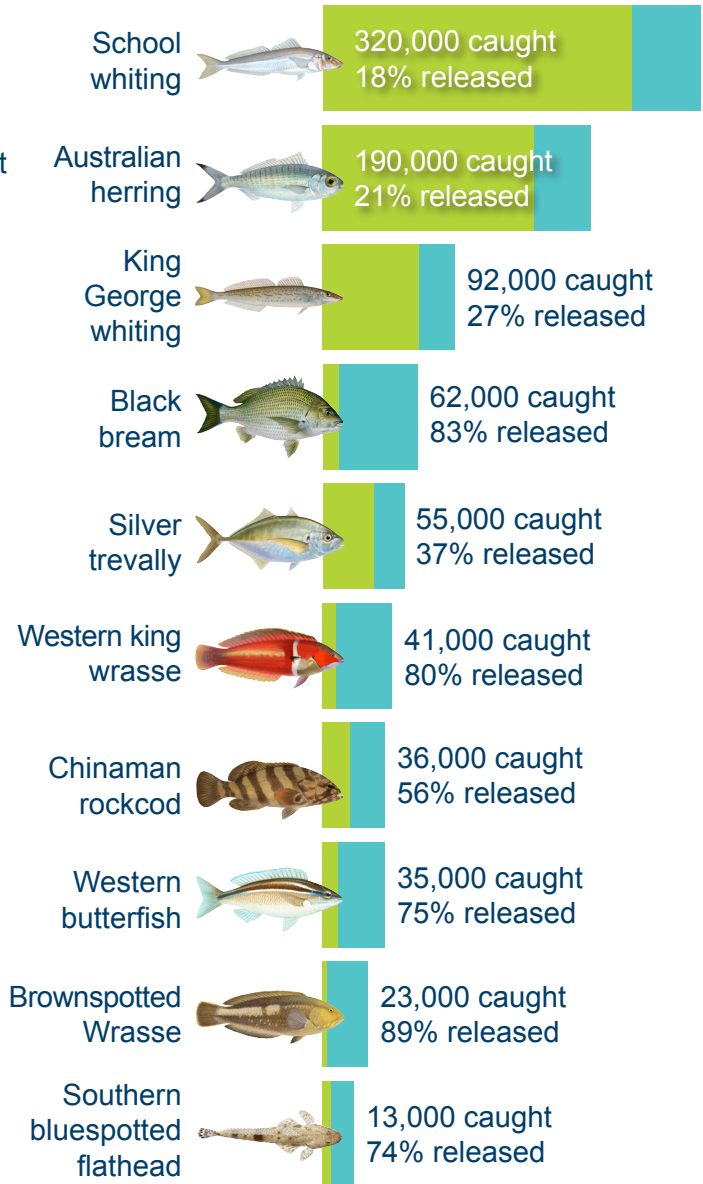
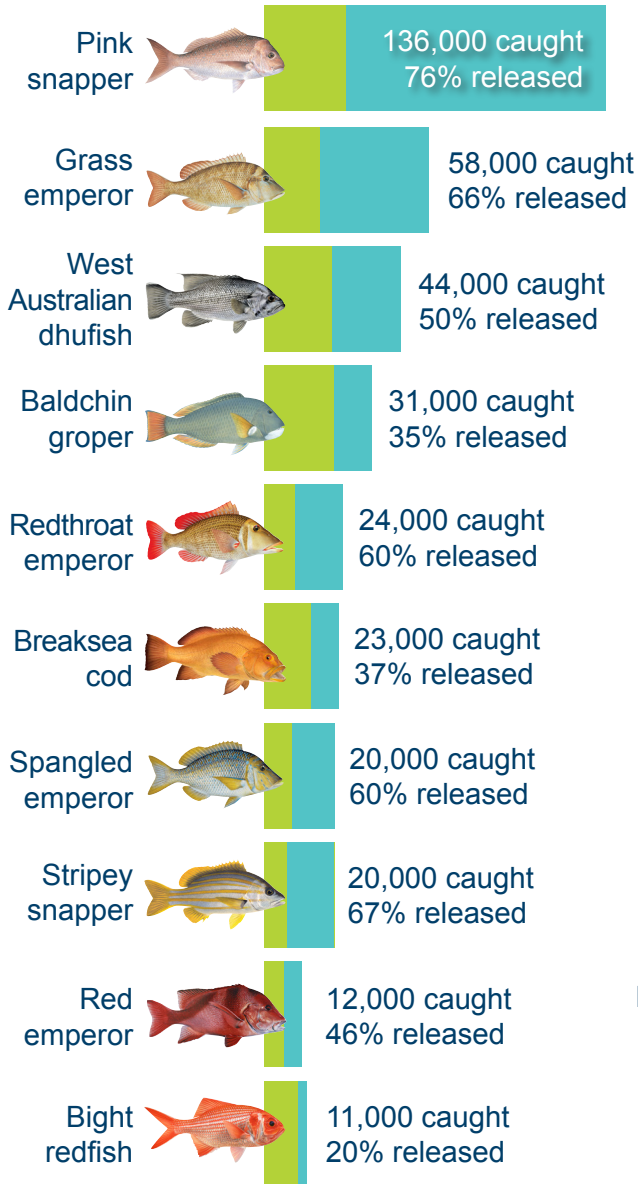
Released

Finfish

About 55% of the recreational catch was finfish (1.65 million) from 209 scalefish species, and 20 ray and shark species.

The most commonly caught inshore and offshore demersal (bottom-dwelling) finfish were:

The most commonly caught nearshore and estuarine finfish were:



Key:

Kept

Released

The most commonly caught pelagic finfish were:



Estimated demersal scalefish catch

The survey results allow us to estimate the recreational harvest (in tonnes) for most demersal species in each bioregion, a popular but vulnerable group.

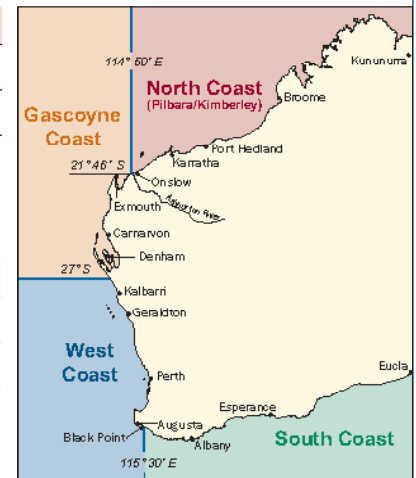
Catches for top three demersal species in each bioregion:

North Coast	Recreational harvest in tonnes				
	2011/12	2013/14	2015/16	2017/18	2020/21
Rankin cod	8	6	4	13	7
Red emperor	10	6	5	15	9
Barcheek coral trout	14	7	6	13	9

Gascoyne Coast	Recreational harvest in tonnes				
	2011/12	2013/14	2015/16	2017/18	2020/21
Pink snapper	30	21	36	23	16
Goldband snapper	6	8	8	7	10
Red emperor	16	10	13	10	11

West Coast	Recreational harvest in tonnes				
	2011/12	2013/14	2015/16	2017/18	2020/21
WA dhufish	78	82	113	127	108
Pink snapper	32	30	36	48	52
Baldchin groper	29	20	32	32	38

South Coast	Recreational harvest in tonnes				
	2011/12	2013/14	2015/16	2017/18	2020/21
Bight redfish	13	11	18	15	11
Blue morwong	12	8	10	9	7
Pink snapper	11	6	8	11	12



We will continue to monitor catches of these species to gain information over time about the sustainability of the stocks and help us make future management decisions.

Where to from here?

We will use estimated catches from boat-based recreational fishing along with catches from charter-boat recreational fishing (reported in Tour Operator Returns) and shore-based recreational fishing (where available) to determine the total catch from the recreational sector.

We will keep working with our research partners at Recfishwest and Edith Cowan University to

improve our understanding of fishing Statewide and in each bioregion to ensure WA's fisheries remain sustainable.

The next statewide recreational fishing survey will commence in mid-2023.

A full version of the report is available at fish.wa.gov.au

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