



Rebuilding the herring stock

Changes are being made to ease fishing pressure

To encourage sustainable fishing and protect the herring stock, a daily bag limit of **12** for recreational fishers and closure of the commercial South Coast G-net Fishery came into force on 1 March 2015.

The changes follow extensive research that showed the herring stock was depleted and proposed the overall catch be halved to reduce the impact of fishing and provide the best opportunity for recovery.

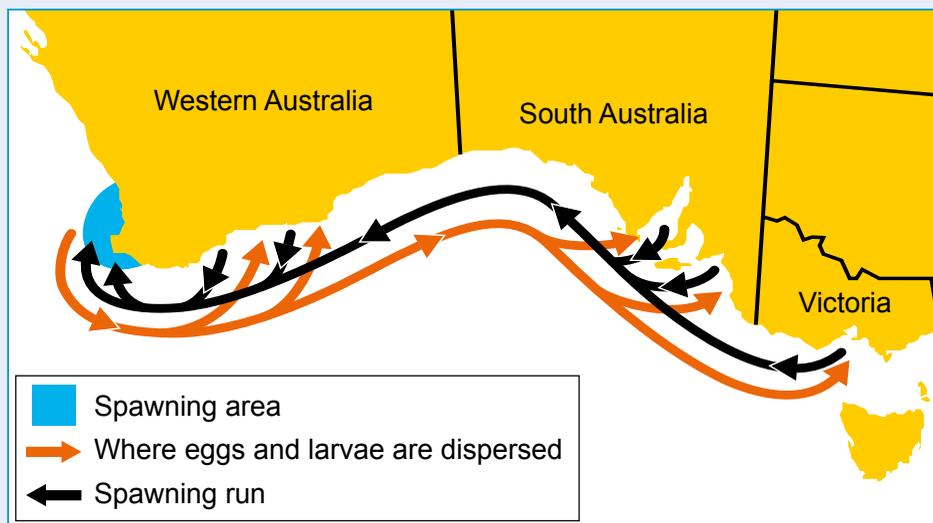
A combination of environmental factors and fishing pressure has been identified as the cause of the current concerns. While we can't control the environment, we can reduce fishing pressure on herring. You can play your part in the herring recovery by sticking to the new bag limit.



Herring science – understanding the factors behind the stock status

All Australian herring are part of a single stock that stretches along Western Australia's west coast, south of Shark Bay, and then east along Australia's southern coast. But spawning occurs on WA's lower west coast.

In some years, a strong current carries most eggs and larvae south and as far east as Victoria. In other years, more eggs and larvae stay on WA's west coast. Herring stay where they settle until reaching maturity, when they migrate back to WA's lower west coast to spawn. After this they stay on WA's west coast – there is no return migration.



Illusion of plenty

If the herring are biting in one area, it may appear as if they are abundant. And the fact that herring travel in schools can add to this perception.

But in recent years, due to unusually warm ocean conditions, many have failed to migrate back to WA's west coast to spawn. This has meant plenty of herring on WA's south coast but low numbers on our west coast.



All catches affect sustainability

Due to the widespread recruitment (addition of young fish to the population) of herring along Australia's southern coast, commercial and recreational fishers from South Australia and WA's south coast take most of the herring catch. They catch the herring before they have had a chance to migrate to the west coast to spawn.

But west coast recreational fishers also catch pre-spawning herring – including large numbers of older breeding females – when herring gather to spawn.

So everyone who catches herring, no matter where, is contributing to the current stock issue. For this reason, we need to reduce catch rates on WA's west and south coasts, and from both recreational and commercial fishing.

We are also exploring a strategy to co-manage the herring fishery across South Australia and WA.

How you can help

While the status of the herring stock is a concern, the Department of Fisheries has successfully tackled similar challenges. For example, management measures taken to reduce fishing pressure on demersal fish stocks have begun to reverse a decline.

But herring is a much shorter-lived, faster-growing species than demersal species, such as pink snapper. So if fishing pressure is reduced to allow more herring to grow to maturity and spawn, signs of recovery could be expected in 6–10 years.

You can help by donating herring frames through our *Send Us Your Skeletons* program, joining our *Research Angler Program*, sticking to the new bag limit, and promoting the new rule among family and friends.



Frequently asked questions

What factors have led to the decline in herring numbers?

A combination of environmental factors and fishing pressure has diminished the herring stock.

The latest herring stock assessment showed that the stock was in a depleted state due to a high rate of mortality. When the breeding stock gets too low, or the environmental conditions are unfavourable for egg and larval survival, recruitment is poor, as it has been since the year 2000. This, combined with the current catch taken by all fishers, is threatening stock sustainability.

How do we know the stock assessment results are correct?

The assessment was independently reviewed by a fisheries expert, who agreed with our assessment approach and the findings.

What changes are being made to address the herring stock issue?

After considering the science and the views of the peak fishing bodies and the wider community, the Minister for Fisheries decided to make changes to ease fishing pressure on herring.

On 1 March 2015, the daily recreational bag limit for herring was reduced from **30** to **12** and the commercial South Coast G-net Fishery was closed.

Based on our ongoing monitoring of the herring stock, the Minister will review the stock status and the new management arrangements before the end of 2016.

For further information about herring, including more frequently asked questions, visit the Department's website at **www.fish.wa.gov.au**

To find out more about how you can help, visit the 'volunteering' page at the website.

Further information

HEAD OFFICE

168 St Georges Terrace, Perth WA 6000
T: (08) 9482 7333 F: (08) 9482 7389
customerservice@fish.wa.gov.au
ABN: 55 689 794 771

www.fish.wa.gov.au

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