



Government of **Western Australia**  
Department of **Fisheries**



**Australian Government**  
Department of **Infrastructure  
and Regional Development**

# Proposed rules for sustainable fishing

## *Cocos (Keeling) Islands*



**T**he purpose of this document is to provide the Cocos (Keeling) Islands community with information on the proposed new island-specific recreational fishing rules for the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

## Background

Since 2002, the Western Australian Department of Fisheries has been responsible for the delivery of fisheries management services at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands on behalf of the Commonwealth Government, under a Service Delivery Arrangement.

The Western Australian Department of Fisheries provides fisheries management services at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands including recreational, commercial and charter fisheries management, aquaculture activity management, biosecurity and fish health diagnostic services, fisheries research, compliance and community education.

## Fish for the future

In order to ensure that the fish, crustaceans and shellfish stocks at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands are managed sustainably (to make sure that there are fish stocks for future generations of island residents), the Department has developed a set of island-specific recreational fishing management arrangements.

These management arrangements have been developed following consultation with on-island community members over several years and recognise community views as well as concerns for the sustainability of fish, crustacean and shellfish stocks.

The Cocos (Keeling) Islands are isolated reefs in the Indian Ocean, located approximately 2,750km north-west of Perth. The isolation of the islands means that the majority of marine species that live on the reefs and lagoons have come to settle there from other remote locations. Due to the isolation of the islands, many of the fish, crustaceans and shellfish species are mainly self-recruiting at Cocos – meaning that it is important that these marine species are not overfished, because if there are not enough fish, crustaceans or molluscs left to produce young, these creatures might not exist at Cocos in the future.

The fish, crustacean and shellfish stocks at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands are also more at risk of overfishing due to the limited size of both the shallow waters around the islands and the habitat available, as the small reefs and lagoon can only sustain limited numbers of these species.

The primary goal of the new recreational fishing management arrangements is to make sure there are fish for the future at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

## **Staged approach**

The new recreational fisheries management arrangements for the Cocos (Keeling) Islands are to be broken into two implementation steps.

### **Step One**

The first step includes the introduction of island-specific recreational fishing bag limits, controls on the amount and type of fish that will be able to be taken off the islands, gear restrictions, and area closures based on social values of sites (e.g. for swimming, surfing or diving).

Following consultation with community members/stakeholders it was determined that initially generous bag limits and the continued use of electric-powered fishing reels was supported. However in order to enable more generous bag limits and ensure that the fish stocks are fished sustainably, there is a need to increase protection to demersal (bottom-living) fish species through other management tools such as demersal fishing area closures.

### **Step Two**

The second step will involve the Department of Fisheries undertaking further community consultation on the boundaries of demersal fishing area closure(s) to ensure increased protection for demersal species at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

## **No size limits**

In recognition of the unique deep water nature of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands fishing, and the need for island-specific recreational fishing management arrangements, no size limits for fish are to apply at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. Despite the lack of size limits, the Western Australian Department of Fisheries continues to strongly encourage fishers to release small-sized fish, when alive and in shallow water, to enable them to grow and produce young before they are taken.

## **No recreational fishing licences**

Fishing licences will not be required for recreational fishing in the territorial waters of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

## Bag limits

A bag limit is the amount of fish, crustaceans or shellfish that one person can take in one day (any 24-hour period commencing at midnight) when fishing. If you catch more than your bag limit, you should carefully return the excess fish, crustaceans or shellfish to the water immediately to ensure that there are fish, crustaceans and shellfish for the future at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

The species bag limit is the maximum number of a particular fish, crustacean, or shellfish that one person will be able to take in a day when fishing, within the combined bag limit. The combined bag limit is the combined number of the types of fish that one person will be able to take in a day when fishing. For example, there will be a combined daily bag limit of four pelagic fish, which could be made up of, say a maximum of one dogtooth tuna plus three other pelagic fish (say, two wahoo and one mahi mahi).

DEMERSAL SPECIES		
SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SPECIES BAG LIMIT
<b>Humpheaded Maori Wrasse</b> and	<i>Cheilinus undulatus</i>	1
<b>Humpheaded Parrotfish</b>	<i>Bolbometopon muricatum</i>	1
<b>Bonefish</b>	<i>Albula</i> spp.	4
<b>Coronation trout</b>	<i>Variola</i> spp.	4
<b>Trevally</b>	Family Carangidae	
<b>Cod</b>	Family Epinephelidae	
<b>Parrotfish</b> (excluding humpheaded parrotfish)	Family Labridae, Tribe Scarini excluding <i>Bolbometopon muricatum</i> )	
<b>Snappers and emperors</b>	Family Lethrinidae and Family Lutjanidae	
<b>Seprat, red and black</b>	Family Berycidae and Family Bramidae	
		COMBINED BAG LIMIT 16

CRUSTACEANS AND SHELLFISH		
SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SPECIES BAG LIMIT
<b>Gong gong</b> (spider shell)	<i>Lambis</i> spp. and <i>Harpago chiragra</i>	20
<b>Clams</b> (excluding giant clam)	<i>Tridacna</i> spp. (excluding <i>Tridacna gigas</i> )	10
<b>Mud crabs</b>	<i>Scylla</i> spp.	2
<b>Lobsters</b>	<i>Panulirus</i> spp.	4

## PELAGIC SPECIES

SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	SPECIES BAG LIMIT	COMBINED BAG LIMIT 4
<b>Wahoo</b>	<i>Acanthocybium solandri</i>		
<b>Tuna</b> (excluding dogtooth tuna)	<i>Thunnus</i> sp.		
<b>Dogtooth tuna</b>	<i>Gymnosarda unicolour</i>	1	
<b>Mahi Mahi</b> (Dolphinfish)	<i>Coryphaena</i> spp.		
<b>Billfish</b> (including sailfish and marlin) and <b>Swordfish</b>	Families Istiophoridae and Xiphiidae		
<b>Barracuda</b>	Family Sphyraenidae		

## LAGOON SPECIES

SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMBINED BAG LIMIT 40
<b>Mullet, sea</b>	<i>Mugil cephalus</i>	
<b>Mullet, diamond scale</b>	<i>Liza vaigiensis</i>	
<b>Silveries</b>	<i>Gerres</i> sp.	
<b>Milkfish</b>	<i>Chanos chanos</i>	

## PROTECTED SPECIES

Protected species may not be taken, and if caught will need to be released back into the water immediately.

SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME
<b>Coral trout*</b>	<i>Plectropomus</i> spp.
<b>White banded cod</b>	<i>Anyperodon leucogrammicus</i>
<b>Giant clams</b>	<i>Tridacna gigas</i>
<b>Sharks and rays</b>	Class Chondrichthyes
<b>Whale sharks</b>	<i>Rhincodon typus</i>
<b>Potato cod</b>	<i>Epinephelus tukula</i>
<b>Queensland groper</b>	<i>Epinephelus lanceolatus</i>
<b>Coral and live rock</b>	Order Scleractinia
<b>Berried</b> (egg-carrying) <b>crabs</b> and <b>lobster</b>	Subphylum Crustacea

\*NOTE: A bag limit for passionfruit coral trout (*Plectropomus areolatus*) is being considered.

## Possession limits Cocos (Keeling) Islands Airport

Given the isolated nature, limited habitat and concern for the sustainability of fish stocks at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, there is a need to limit the amount and types of fish, shellfish and crustaceans being exported off the island.

In order to restrict the amount of fish, crustaceans and shellfish being taken off Cocos and ensure that the fish resources are managed for the benefit of the on-island community, there will be a limit of the type and amount of fish a person can have in their possession in the area of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Airport (and therefore be able to transport off-island).

While in the area of the Cocos (Keeling) Islands Airport, one person will be able to have in their possession no more than 5 kg of tuna or wahoo only. A person will not be able to have any additional/other fish, crustacean or shellfish species in their possession when in the area of the airport.

When in the airport area, the fish making up the possession limit of up to 5kg of tuna or wahoo species (trunk or fillet) will be required:

- to have the skin attached;
- to be packaged flat;
- to be packaged so it is easily accessible for identification; and
- where frozen, to be identified without being thawed.

## Possession Limits – Cocos (Keeling) Islands (other than the airport)

The maximum quantity of finfish – either whole or in pieces – that you will be able to have in your possession (control/ownership) at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands (except the airport) is:

- 20 kg of fillets of finfish; or
- 10 kg of fillets of finfish and one day's bag limit of whole fish or fish trunks; or
- two day's bag limit of whole fish or fish trunks.

This possession limit will not apply to commercially purchased fish (although you may be asked for proof of purchase).

## Filleting at sea

You will be able to carry fish at sea and land it:

- whole (can be gutted and gilled);
- trunked (i.e. with head and tail removed), with skin and scale on; or
- filleted, with skin and scale on.

The fish will need to be packaged so that it is easily accessible for identification, and if frozen, so that it can be identified without being thawed. This will not apply if you are on a boat and the fish is being consumed or being prepared for immediate consumption.

**!** **NOTE:** *Two fillets are considered to be equal to one whole fish for the purpose of bag limits.*

**!** **NOTE:** *Molluscs (such as gong gong and clams) will be able to be 'shucked' (meat taken out of the shell), however for the purpose of bag limits one piece of mollusc meat will be considered as one mollusc (i.e. one piece of gong gong is considered to be equal to one whole gong gong).*

## Legal fishing gear

### ***Rods, lines and hooks***

Shore-based recreational fishers will be able to use a maximum of two fishing lines. Rods and lines will be required to be attended.

### ***Fishing for mud crabs and lobster***

Mud crabs and lobster will be able to be taken at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, however fishers will be prohibited from using pointed instruments to catch them.

### ***Spearfishing on compressed air***

Spearfishing on compressed air (such as scuba) will be prohibited at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, as spearfishing is a highly selective fishing method that can have a major impact on the sustainability of resident reef species.

### ***Net Fishing***

Net fishing is an effective fishing method for catching lagoon species such as mullet and silveries, but if used inappropriately nets can result in high and unsustainable catches of a number of species. The lagoon is a nursery area for fish and it is important that it is treated with respect.

Net fishing at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands will be permitted, under the following rules:

- nets must be attended at all times (within 100 metres of the nearest part of the net);
- nets must be removed from the water and all fish must be removed from the net at least once every hour;
- nets used for fishing must be no more than 60 metres in total length;
- a fishing net must not be set within 50 metres of any other net that is set;
- net drop must be no more than 25 meshes;
- net mesh size must be no more than 114 mm and no less than 63 mm;
- net fishing is prohibited in channels between islands, leading in and out of the lagoon; and
- net fishing is prohibited in the waters of the northern lagoon on West Island.

## **Other Prohibited Fishing Gear**

Recreational fishers will not be able to:

- use fish traps;
- use dredges;
- obstruct any bay, inlet or any waters so that fish are enclosed, left stranded, destroyed or wasted;
- be in possession of explosives or noxious substances on the waters of Cocos (Keeling) Islands; and
- attach fish hooks to anchors, anchor lines or moorings.

## **Areas closed to fishing**

A number of areas around the Cocos (Keeling) Islands will be closed to fishing due to their value to the island community for swimming, diving, snorkelling, and surfing.

No fishing will be permitted in the waters locally known as Trannies Beach, Pulu Maria, the Surf Shack, the Surf Spot, the 'Rip' at Direction Island and south east of the Jetty at Direction Island (however you may fish by rod or handline from the Direction Island jetty).

No fishing for demersal species (bottom-living species such as humpheaded maori wrasse, humpheaded parrotfish, bonefish, coronation trout, trevally, cod, snapper, seaperch, emperor, etc) will be permitted within 150 metres radius of the dive site moorings locally known as Cologne Gardens, Rose Wall, Cabbage Patch and Aquarium Wall.

## **Further information**

### **NORTHERN REGIONAL OFFICE & BROOME DISTRICT OFFICE**

Port of Pearls House, 401 Port Drive  
Broome WA 6725

T: (08) 9193 8600

IndianOceanTerritories@fish.wa.gov.au

[www.fish.wa.gov.au/IOTs](http://www.fish.wa.gov.au/IOTs)

*Fish for the future*

Cover photo © Andrew Cribb

