



12 DEC, 2025

## PRIZED FISH OFF TABLE

Augusta Margaret River Times, Margaret River



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COMMERCIAL BAN LEAVES CONSUMERS WITH LESS CHOICE &amp; HIGHER PRICES

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**MADELIN HAYES**

The State Government's decision to permanently ban commercial demersal fishing along much of WA's coast could see South West fishers pack up shop, leaving the industry

after decades.

After nearly 25 years of fishing in the West Coast zone, Southwest Wildecatch owner Vern Wilde said he had "no idea" what to do next — just one of many set to be affected by a 900km no-fish zone.

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## Shock over sudden fish ban

**MADELIN HAYES**

The State Government's decision to permanently ban commercial demersal fishing along 900km of coastline has left long-time South West operators fearing for their futures and warning consumers to brace for higher prices and fewer choices.

After nearly 25 years of fishing in the West Coast zone, Southwest Wildecatch owner Vern Wilde said he had "no idea" what to do next.

"At this stage, we've just been busy just trying to get enough fish for everyone," he said.

"The demand for fresh local fish has just gone through the roof, it's almost like COVID panic buying.

"We weren't given any notice at all, we found out over the radio. It was disgusting the way it was han-

dled."

Under the reforms, commercial demersal fishing will cease from January 1 in the West Coast bioregion, while recreational boat-based fishers won't be allowed to return until spring 2027. Jetty and shore-based demersal fishing remains permitted.

The State Government has announced a \$29.2 million reimbursement package, including \$20m for a compulsory buyout of commercial fisheries in the West Coast region.

But Mr Wilde said the shutdown was unnecessary in the South West. "Down here, there was absolutely no reason to shut it down," he said.

"Half of our catch is bight red-

fish, more commonly known as nannygai, and they're fully sustainable, low-risk. Dhufish is just under a quarter of our catch.

"We put in submissions but got no negotiation, no offer, nothing."

In Dunsborough, Blue Manna Bistro owner Coby Cockburn said the ban would have a flow-on impact on the dining scene, affecting what he could put on the menu.

"All the fishermen that I buy off have already said that their prices will go up," he said.

"We usually offer three different types of fish, but we probably won't be able to do that anymore.

"We just have to sit back and see how it all unfolds."

Mr Cockburn said it was going to hit the business harder in the fam-



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ily's seafood shop.

"Fish prices have gone through the roof over the last four or five years anyway," he said.

"If it gets too expensive to buy fish, we'll probably just close the fish shop. At least in the restaurant, we can pivot towards other seafood or even meat, even though we're seafood orientated."

Aristos Waterfront Bunbury owner Anton Keyzer said he was bracing for the change.

"We feature dhufish and snapper on our menu, so we will have to look for other options," he said.

"We are a well-known seafood restaurant, known for fresh seafood, so we'll have to look elsewhere for our fish supply."

Fisheries Minister Jackie Jarvis said she recognised the reforms would have a big impact on the fishing community, industry and related sectors.

"This fishery has been in recovery for 15 years, with catch limits steadily declining and multiple stock assessments confirming ongoing depletion," she said.

"The science behind these assessments is independently reviewed and meets international best practice standards. It cannot

be ignored, and it demands that we act now. I've been engaging with all sectors of the fishing community including the peak body representing commercial fishers — the WA Fishing Industry Council — throughout this decision-making process."

But WA Fishing Industry Council chief executive Melissa Haslam told the Times the decision was an "absolute shock" and "completely unnecessary".

"Most commercial fishing operations in the South West will close, there is about five very active demersal fishers down there in the South West corner and a handful of shark fishermen as well . . . all of those guys will close," she said.

"There's really no option for them with the reforms, this is what's so hard for them, because they've shut the whole West Coast.

"As an organisation, we were saying to break it down into smaller, bite-sized pieces . . . there could have been some very sustainable solutions in that if there was an appetite to consider it but the Government has used just a very blunt instrument and just treated that whole west coast as one area."

Recfishwest chief executive Andrew Rowland said he was dis-

appointed by the State Government's decision to close West Coast boat-based demersal fishing until September 2027.

"It's a tough outcome for many fishers and for small business owners who depend on fishing," he said. "Summer is the key dhufish spawning period and everyone agrees we need to give them a break.

"There are of course plenty of other offshore fishing options during summer including tuna, yellowtail kingfish, Samsonfish, dolphinfish at the FADs and closer to shore king george whiting and squid."

Dr Rowland said for many recreational fishers, it's short-term pain for long term gain.





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Southwest Wildecatch owner Vern Wilde says the reforms have left his business in limbo. Picture: Southwest Wildecatch