



Frequently Asked Questions

Christmas Island Recreational Fishing Rules 2022

August 2022

Why have new fishing rules been introduced?

Previously, all of the Western Australian (WA) fishing rules were applied at Christmas Island (CI). However, these rules were not designed for the local marine environment and community values. Over the past year, the Australian Government has worked with the CI Fisheries Management Committee and CI community members, together with Sea Country Solutions and the Pew Charitable Trusts, to develop new rules that are suitable for CI. These rules were endorsed by a public ballot of the CI community in 2021 and have become the basis for the 2022 CI fisheries ordinance.

The new fishing rules take into account the unique CI environment, along with the values and cultural needs of the community. These rules aim to protect fish stocks, ensuring sustainability of these fisheries for current and future generations of CI residents.

When will the new rules come into effect?

The new rules have already been introduced and are currently in effect. The initial focus is on educating the CI community and visitors to the island about the new rules.

In addition to the new fishing rules, the Australian Government will continue to work with the local community to introduce a new collaborative fisheries management framework for CI. A community education campaign, providing further information about the new rules and management framework, will be rolled out in the near future.

What are the key elements of the new rules?

The new fishing rules include a range of measures to protect fish stocks, including:

- Daily bag limits for pelagic and demersal finfish and rock lobster
- An airport possession limit for the export of fish off island of 10 kilograms per person
- Totally protected species
- Requirements for fish to be landed whole, as fish trunks or skin-on fillets
- Fishing gear controls
- Spearfishing prohibition at Flying Fish Cove.

How do the new rules compare to WA rules?

When compared to WA rules, the new rules for CI are less restrictive, for example:

Rule	Christmas Island	Western Australia mainland
Recreational fishing licences	No recreational fishing licence requirements.	There are six types of recreational fishing licences.
Possession limits	No general possession limit. Limit of 10kg of fish per person at CI airport (for export of fish off island).	Possession limit of 20 kg of fillets of any species at a person's principal place of residence. Possession limits also applied for rock lobster, marron and abalone.
Pelagic finfish	Mixed bag limit of 4 per person, per day	Mixed bag limit of 3 per person, per day
Demersal finfish	Mixed bag limit of 15 per person, per day	Mixed bag limit of 5 per person, per day (north coast)
Boat limit	None	Applies for blue swimmer crabs, mud crabs, squid, octopus, cuttlefish, greenlip/brownlip abalone, rock lobster and dhufish in the west coast bioregion.

Why is there a limit to what fish I can take off CI?

The CI airport fish possession limit is an important tool to keep fishing pressure at a reasonable level and ensure the benefits from CI fish stocks can continue to be enjoyed by those on island.

Each person in the airport area is allowed to have in their possession up to 10 kilograms of any fish that may be legally caught at the island. When in the airport area, the fish must:

- if finfish, have the skin attached
- be packaged flat
- be packaged so it is easily accessible for identification
- if frozen, be identifiable without being thawed.

This is to support easy identification of the species being taken off island.

Will I be able to spearfish?

Yes, you can spearfish at CI, however, not with compressed air or breathing apparatus (e.g. SCUBA), or within Flying Fish Cove. This helps to protect fish stocks and supports community safety.

Are there protections for crustaceans?

Yes, reproducing crustaceans, including female crabs and female rock lobsters with eggs or spawn attached beneath their bodies, are totally protected and must not be taken.

There is also a daily bag limit of four rock lobster per person. Importantly, you may not use a spear or gidgee to take rock lobster.

Will these new rules be permanent?

The new rules are currently in effect and will continue into the future. However, we anticipate community values, environmental conditions and fish stocks may change over time and with these changes, the rules may need to adapt.

Any future changes will involve input and consultation with the CI Fisheries Advisory Committee and engagement with the CI community.

Recreational fishing activities and their impacts will be subject to ongoing research and will be monitored closely. The new rules will be reviewed as additional information becomes available, including through community-based projects and citizen science.

The primary focus remains that CI fish stocks are managed in a sustainable way for current and future generations of CI residents.

What community consultation occurred to develop these rules?

Fishing practices on CI have been the subject of community consultation for many years with stakeholders including the local community, the Administrator of the Territory of Christmas Island, the Shire of Christmas Island, local businesses, community groups, other government agencies, port operators, fishers and other interested individuals.

More recently, the CI Fisheries Management Committee has worked with local residents to capture and represent the views of the CI community for consideration by the Government.

These new rules, including bag and export limits, were endorsed by a public ballot of the CI community in October 2021.

What is the Christmas Island Fisheries Advisory Committee?

The CI Fisheries Advisory Committee acts in an advisory capacity to the Minister regarding local fisheries matters. The members are appointed based on their ability to contribute to fisheries management at CI, drawing on their local knowledge and expertise to provide advice to the Minister.

The CI Fisheries Management Committee forms the membership of the inaugural CI Fisheries Advisory Committee.

What studies and research have taken place?

Fisheries research and monitoring at CI began in 2007 and has included species and habitat surveys, biological sampling and catch composition, using methods such as underwater visual surveys, baited remote underwater video surveys, environmental surveys, satellite receivers, and eDNA (environmental DNA obtained from water samples). Previous studies have explored species diversity, distribution and abundance and whether stocks are 'self-sustaining' through local recruitment or rely on periodical recruitment from elsewhere.

Research and monitoring activities will continue into the future with a focus on species and habitats of high importance for the CI community and local marine ecosystems. Community involvement and collaboration will be a key element of these programs, along with scientific research.

What happens if someone breaks the rules?

The new laws, which include penalties for fishing offences, are now in effect. The initial focus is on educating the CI community and visitors to the Island about the new rules.

Over the next few months, the Australian Government will continue to work with the CI Fisheries Management Committee and the CI community to implement an effective fisheries compliance system that takes into account community expectations.

What if I have further questions?

Please contact the Department of Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts by emailing IOTfisheries@infrastructure.gov.au

