

# Spanish mackerel

## Fact Sheet



### FUN FACTS ON A FISHY PREDATOR

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**1** Spanish mackerel can live for more than 20 years!

**2** Large females can produce more than 1 million eggs each spawning season, as each female usually spawns a number of times every season. Even 30 million eggs is technically possible for a 10kg female if she spawned every 3-4 days! Fisheries Queensland, however, consider around 80,000 eggs per kilo of bodyweight as the average.

**3** Tagged Spanish mackerel have been reported to swim over 700 nautical miles – that's more than 1,296 kilometres!

**4** Spanish mackerel are thought to be migratory, travelling south along the coast in the warmer southbound currents, while fish from the south often travel north as winter arrives – all the while remaining near the coast.

**5** Male Spanish mackerel are smaller than females of the same age.

## Meet the Spanish mackerel of the Gladstone region

Spanish mackerel (*Scomberomorus commerson*) are one of Queensland's best sportfish, prized by fishers of all ages for their good fighting and eating qualities.

They are the biggest of the five species (or types) of mackerel found in Australian waters and are believed to be able to grow to up to 2.4 metres long (fork length, measured from the tip of the snout to the 'fork' of the tail rather than the end of the tail) and weigh more than 100 kilograms.

You can spot a Spanish mackerel by their long, narrow bodies that are dark blue along the top (sometimes tending to green), silver towards the centre and underneath, with narrow dark blue or black bars running vertically along their body in a stripy pattern.

### What's on a mackerel's menu

Spanish mackerel are ferocious predators and will eat smaller fish like anchovies, herring, and sardines, as well as squid and prawns.

### Migration

Spanish mackerel are offshore, pelagic (surface-dwelling) fish that can be found in water as shallow as 15 metres or as deep as 200 metres!

They love tropical and sub-tropical temperatures (which makes Gladstone a perfect habitat) with adults living around offshore and coastal reefs while small juveniles (less than 10 centimetres long) prefer the safety of creeks and estuaries.

Facing Island is a favourite hang out for these feisty fish and lots of Spanish mackerel swim by Sable Chief Rocks between May and October each year.

### Keeping us around

Fisheries Queensland has assessed the Queensland Spanish mackerel fishery as being 'sustainably fished'.

Regional fish habitat areas and marine protected areas can protect offshore and inshore fish.

The Queensland government has a declared fish habitat area (FHA) network strategy to ensure fishing for the future. These habitat areas have restrictions on physical disturbance and coastal development, whilst still allowing you to wet a line and catch your favourite fish.



Spanish mackerel  
© Graham Cumming  
Courtesy of dreamfish.com.au

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## Life cycle

Spanish mackerel come together at offshore reefs between October and December to spawn (release sperm and eggs) when the ocean temperature is at its warmest. In central and north Queensland, peak spawning is believed to occur during the high tidal flows during new moon periods in October and November. Spanish mackerel are a fast growing species and can reach over 40 centimetres in length in their first year of life, reaching maturity at two years of age.

Spanish mackerel eggs contain an oil droplet to keep them floating near the surface of the ocean where it's warmer and there is access to more food (plankton) once they hatch as larvae.



## How to catch a Spanish mackerel

Spanish mackerel are best fished during the summer months as they migrate. Most people fish for Spanish mackerel by slow trolling rigged fish baits, with wolf herring being popular locally, but there are other ways you can catch them:

- using a pilchard on a floater rig
- jigging and casting with metal lures (slugs and spoons)
- trolling a pilchard on a gang hook rod with a squid skirt – they say pink ones work the best!

But hooking a Spanish mackerel is only the start of the battle! Once you hook them they are fast and strong fighters - and are also being watched by sharks if they are in the area, so you have to move quickly before they go for your catch!

Spanish mackerel also come with a mouthful of sharp teeth and most fishermen recommend dispatching, bleeding, and icing the fish as soon as possible to ensure it is at its best for the dinner table.

When fishing for Spanish mackerel you should also be aware of ciguatera poisoning. The larger (over 15 kilograms) fish are those most at risk of carrying ciguatera, but even smaller fish may carry the toxin, which can cause joint pain and diarrhoea.

Ciguatera test kits, like cigua-check are available online but they may be unreliable. The safest course of action is to only eat Spanish mackerel under 10 kilograms.

## Risks

Spanish mackerel are targeted by recreational and commercial fishers so there is danger they may be overfished (caught faster than they can reproduce) but the latest information from 2009 suggests that this isn't currently a risk.

## What you can do to keep the mackerel swimming

- Queensland has laws about the size and number of Spanish mackerel you can take home to eat. You can only have **three** Spanish mackerel in your possession and each fish must be a minimum of **75 centimetres** from head to tail ('total length').
- Remember that all drains lead to the ocean – always dispose of your rubbish in a bin and never pour chemicals down a drain!
- Get involved with the [Spanish mackerel monitoring program](#)

## Find out more

Visit the Queensland Fisheries website for the [rules and regulations for fishing for Spanish mackerel](#) and for more information [on the species](#).

Click the above links or go to:  
[www.daff.qld.gov.au/fisheries](http://www.daff.qld.gov.au/fisheries)



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