

The top half of the cover features a light green background with a pattern of fine, wavy lines representing water. Several stylized fish, composed of fine lines, are scattered across this area, swimming in various directions. The bottom half of the cover is a solid dark green color.

Queensland east coast Spanish mackerel fishery

Final consultation on
proposed management action

Discussion paper
July 2022

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The Department of Agriculture and Fisheries proudly acknowledges all First Nations peoples (Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders) and the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the country on which we live and work. We acknowledge their continuing connection to land, waters and culture and commit to ongoing reconciliation. We pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging.

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Summary

Released in December 2021, the 2020 stock assessment for Australian east coast Spanish mackerel estimated the biomass to be approximately 17%. Under Commonwealth and Queensland harvest strategy guidelines, immediate management action is required to rebuild fish stocks when the biomass falls below the limit reference point of 20% biomass. Doing nothing is not an option.

Following meetings with the Spanish mackerel fishery working group in 2021 and early 2022, a round of public consultation was conducted between 6 April 2022 and 5 May 2022 on possible management measures to rebuild the stock. Feedback was received through 1437 responses to the online survey, 49 written submissions, one-on-one discussions with fishery stakeholders over the phone, and during meetings across Queensland's east coast with affected fishers and industry representatives.

Following analysis of stakeholder preferences and assessment of the ecological and socio-economic impacts and benefits of the different combinations of management measures, a rebuilding timeframe of 13–14 years achieved through a 35–40% reduction in current harvest levels is proposed. This approach aligns with stakeholder feedback and, recognising the need to support local businesses and continue the collection of fishing data to monitor stock recovery, allows some fishing to continue while the stock rebuilds.

Three scenarios were modelled to achieve a rebuilding timeframe of 13–14 years. One scenario included a two-year complete closure of the fishery and is not presented as an option for further consultation because of the significant socio-economic impacts this option would likely have. Consequently, two options (see **Table 1**) for proposed management action to rebuild the east coast Spanish mackerel stock to sustainable levels have been identified for further consultation. The final management action, to be determined through this final round of public consultation, is proposed to be implemented in stages, commencing in October 2022. This final management action would then be maintained until either the stock rebuilds to sustainable levels (40% biomass), or new information indicates that those measures should be revised. This includes stronger management action should there be no evidence of stock rebuilding.

Management action will be supported by a rebuilding harvest strategy, which sets out long-term objectives for the fishery, defines catch shares among fishing sectors and specifies decision rules for managing the fishery. A draft east coast Spanish mackerel fishery harvest strategy has also been developed for consultation and will also be informed by feedback on proposed management actions to rebuild the stock.

Table 1: Options for proposed management action

Management measures		Option 1	Option 2	Proposed commencement
All sectors	Northern seasonal closure (North of 22°S)	6 weeks { 22 Oct – 12 Nov }* { 21 Nov – 12 Dec }	12 weeks { 24 Aug – 14 Sep } { 23 Sep – 14 Oct }* { 22 Oct – 12 Nov } { 21 Nov – 12 Dec }	22 October 2022**
	Southern seasonal closure (South of 22°S)	6 weeks { 1 Feb – 21 Feb } { 1 Mar – 21 Mar }	12 weeks { 1 Feb – 21 Feb } { 1 Mar – 21 Mar } { 1 Apr – 21 Apr } { 1 May – 21 May }	1 February 2023**
Commercial	Total allowable commercial catch	165 tonnes	184 tonnes	1 July 2023
Recreational	In-possession limit	1 fish per person	2 fish per person	1 July 2023
	Boat limit (2 or more people on board)	2 fish per boat	4 fish per boat	1 July 2023
	Catch reporting	Yes	Yes	1 January 2024
Charter	In-possession limit (no extended trip limit)	1 fish per person	2 fish per person	1 July 2023
Indigenous	Commercial fishing development***	Up to 2 tonnes	Up to 2 tonnes	1 July 2023

* Proposed northern seasonal closure dates are indicative only and are proposed to change each year according to new moon periods, similar to the existing reef line closures. The seasonal closures are broken up by about one week between closure blocks to allow some level of fishing to provide for limited commercial market supply throughout the seasonal closure. If Option 2 is implemented, there will be a shorter northern seasonal closure for 2022 (only) to allow time for fishers to adjust to the new arrangements.

** In consideration of pre-existing charter bookings made up to a year in advance, seasonal closures would not apply to recreational fishers on licensed charter fishing trips until the following season, starting on 1 July 2023.

*** The traditional fishing rights of First Nations peoples are protected under native title legislation and are not affected by any proposed management measures. Indigenous fishing permits may be issued on a case-by-case basis to provide economic development opportunities for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders and their communities.

Background

Under the *Queensland harvest strategy policy*, rebuilding timeframes should be set based on the minimum time taken to rebuild the stock in the absence of fishing. For east coast Spanish mackerel, this equates to a rebuilding timeframe of 7–14 years. The *Queensland harvest strategy policy* enables management options that allow for some level of restricted fishing to occur while a stock rebuilds instead of a total closure, with consideration of social and economic impacts and the need to continue collecting data from fishers to monitor stock recovery.

Of the submissions received through the first round of consultation, most respondents identified as recreational fishers (89%), with submissions also received from commercial fishers (7%), charter fishing operators (4%), interested community members (8%), seafood wholesales/marketers (<1%), hospitality workers/owners (1%), fishing tackle retailers (2%), Traditional Owners/fishers (2%) and environmental, industry peak body and other non-government organisations together/combined (2%).

The social and economic impacts of all rebuilding scenarios are significant, but it is clear from stakeholder feedback that a rebuilding timeframe of less than 13 years is not desirable. A rebuilding timeframe of 13–14 years is proposed through a harvest reduction of 35–40% across all sectors, to:

- allow some fishing to occur, maintaining a local supply and market for Spanish mackerel and supporting businesses that rely on the fishery
- support rebuilding through greater reproductive output by leaving approximately 175 to 189 additional tonnes of Spanish mackerel in the water (i.e. not harvested by any fishing sector) each year
- minimise social and economic impacts while still achieving an acceptable rebuilding timeframe of 7–14 years
- allow fishing data to be collected to monitor stock recovery and assess the effectiveness of the implemented management actions
- align with stakeholder feedback on preferred combinations of management measures.

East coast Spanish mackerel is fast-growing species, meaning it is likely to respond well to proposed management action. Further, the fishery is supported by a robust monitoring and assessment program, meaning that evidence of successful management action and stock rebuilding should be evident within four years.

It is acknowledged that longer seasonal closures proposed as part of Option 2 are likely to have greater impacts on stakeholders. However, it is also acknowledged that the higher in-possession limit in Option 2 may be less effective in constraining recreational harvest, especially as the population continues to grow. Most of the feedback from recreational fishers showed a clear preference for a lower catch limit to reduce the length of a seasonal closure.

Stakeholder feedback strongly supported the need for better reporting of recreationally caught Spanish mackerel. Improved mechanisms, strategies and systems for reporting recreationally caught Spanish mackerel are included in both options. However, further consultation is required to determine if recreational catch reporting for Spanish mackerel should be voluntary or mandatory and how this might be implemented. Possible options include physical tagging, electronic reporting via a smartphone app, reporting via logbooks, or catch record cards. Information from this improved reporting will be used to manage recreational harvest more effectively as Queensland's population grows and the number of recreational fishers and fishing tourism continue to grow.

Shark depredation is also recognised as an issue across several fisheries. Further research and monitoring is required to understand its causes and to inform potential solutions. Stakeholder feedback indicated that shark depredation is particularly prevalent in the Spanish mackerel fishery, resulting in high levels of fishing-related mortality. Shark depredation and information collection will be discussed and refined further through the Spanish mackerel fishery working group.

Draft harvest strategy

Harvest strategies specify pre-determined management actions that are necessary to achieve the ecological, economic and/or social objectives of a fishery. Harvest strategies define the objectives for each fishery that apply to all fishing sectors. They set out the existing catch shares among all fishing sectors and aim to maintain those over time. The most important parts of each harvest strategy are the decision rules, which set the future management framework for target, byproduct and bycatch species in the fishery.

More information about harvest strategies and how they work, including published harvest strategies, are available at fisheries.qld.gov.au.

The draft *East coast Spanish mackerel fishery harvest strategy: 2023–2028* has been developed in line with the *Queensland harvest strategy policy*. It will underpin future decision-making for this fishery, such as adjusting catch limits and recreational fishing rules depending on the performance of the Spanish mackerel stock. This harvest strategy establishes:

- an initial target reference point of 40% biomass, moving to maximum economic yield (60% biomass) after rebuilding has occurred
- a limit reference point of 20% biomass that would trigger a closure of the fishery consistent with national standards and the *Queensland Sustainable Fisheries Strategy: 2017–2027* if rebuilding does not occur
- a catch share arrangement of 60% commercial and 40% recreational (including charter), with up to an additional 2 tonnes per fishing year to encourage Indigenous commercial fishing activity
- a schedule of performance monitoring, assessment and review over four to five years, with the next stock assessment for Spanish mackerel scheduled for 2026–27 to determine the extent of stock recovery.

An effective and well-considered harvest strategy is an important component of rebuilding the east coast Spanish mackerel fishery. Without one, there is no clear pathway for when the next stock assessment will be undertaken, when fishing rules can be reviewed, how fishing restrictions can eventually be eased, what will happen once the stock has rebuilt to sustainable levels, how the resource will be shared between sectors and, ultimately, how the fishery will be managed. This is important not just for providing stakeholders with certainty about their future but also for ensuring that management actions can respond to changing conditions and new information.

This consultation provides an opportunity for you to have your say on the Spanish mackerel harvest strategy before it is finalised.

Have your say

No decisions have been made and none will be made until after this final round of consultation.

Feedback is now sought from commercial, recreational, charter and traditional fishers, environmental groups and other stakeholders on final management options to rebuild the Queensland east coast Spanish mackerel fishery to sustainable levels, along with the draft harvest strategy to support the ongoing management of this fish stock.

The fastest and easiest way to provide your feedback is to complete the online survey at:
daf.engagementhub.com.au/spanish-mackerel-2022

The survey questions are also available at the end of this document if you would prefer to print the survey and post your submission to:

Spanish mackerel fishery discussion paper
Department of Agriculture and Fisheries
GPO Box 46
Brisbane Qld 4001

PLEASE NOTE: The survey questions are designed to seek your input.

Submissions close midnight, Friday 5 August 2022.



For more information, email fisheriesmanagers@daf.qld.gov.au or call 13 25 23.

If you would like to receive updates on the Spanish mackerel consultation, email your details to fisheriesmanagers@daf.qld.gov.au.

Next steps

Your feedback will be used to inform the Queensland Government's final decision on management action and a harvest strategy to rebuild this important fishery.

Indicative road map

5 August 2022

- Second round of public consultation closes

August / early October 2022

- Stakeholder feedback considered and consultation report developed
- Results of consultation provided to the Spanish mackerel fishery working group and Sustainable Fisheries Strategy Expert Panel for final feedback on draft harvest strategy and management options
- Final decision made by Queensland Government and stakeholders notified

22 October 2022

- Northern seasonal closures commence

1 February 2023

- Southern seasonal closures commence

1 July 2023

- Management of the fishery under the harvest strategy commences, including changes to total allowable commercial catch, in-possession and boat limits commence

1 January 2024

- Recreational catch reporting commences

2026/2027

- New stock assessment conducted and possible management action if required

July 2028

- Harvest strategy fully reviewed

Ongoing

- Regular meetings with the Spanish mackerel fishery working group to receive operational advice on the management of the fishery (including an annual performance review of the harvest strategy), amending fishing rules or the harvest strategy if required
- Further research and monitoring to track stock recovery and improve the information underpinning fisheries management decisions



For more information, email fisheriesmanagers@daf.qld.gov.au or call 13 25 23.

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Survey questions

Your say matters and we want to hear from you. The questions marked with an asterisk (*) are mandatory.

Question 1. Tell us who you are:

Name:

Postcode*:

Address:

Email address:

Question 2. Which sector(s) of the Spanish mackerel fishery do you identify with?*

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commercial fisher | <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing tackle retailer |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Recreational fisher | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental group, industry peak body or other non-government organisation |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charter fishing operator | <input type="checkbox"/> Interested community member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Traditional fisher / Traditional Owner | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):
_____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seafood wholesaler/marketer | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hospitality (restaurant, café, fish and chip shop) owner/worker | |

Question 3. Which of the two proposed management options do you prefer?*

- Option 1
- Option 2

While Option 1 and Option 2 are expected to result in similar rebuilding timeframes, the longer seasonal closures proposed as part of Option 2 are likely to have more impacts on fishers. Also the higher recreational in-possession limit may be less effective in constraining recreational harvest as the population continues to grow.

Question 4. Should recreational catch reporting for Spanish mackerel be mandatory or voluntary?

- Mandatory
- Voluntary

Mandatory reporting would be more effective for monitoring recreational harvest but is likely to be more complex in terms of implementation, education, compliance and management.

Question 5. How should recreational catch reporting for Spanish mackerel be implemented?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physical tag | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical logbook or form |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Smartphone app | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify):
_____ |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Online form | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Automated phone call | |

There are a range of ways that recreational catch can be reported. Consideration should be given for approaches that will allow recreational harvest to be monitored in a user-friendly, timely and cost-effective way.

Question 6. Does the east coast Spanish mackerel fishery harvest strategy provide clarity about the overall fishery objectives, when future stock assessments will be completed and when decision rules will be applied?

- Strongly agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly disagree

Management actions will be supported by a rebuilding harvest strategy, which sets out long-term objectives for the fishery, defines catch shares among fishing sectors and specifies decision rules for managing the fishery.

Please provide a reason for your response:

Question 7. Does the proposed catch share arrangement of 60% commercial and 40% recreational (including charter) appropriately reflect the use of this shared resource by different fishing sectors?

- Strongly agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly disagree

All fishing sectors have a shared responsibility for the sustainability of the Spanish mackerel stock. This requires an equitable approach that reduces fishing pressure from all sectors that can drive successful rebuilding of the stock. The proposed catch share of 60% commercial and 40% recreational (including charter) reflects historical usage since 2004. Each of the rebuilding options has been developed based on maintaining this catch share.

Please provide a reason for your response:

Question 8. Do the information and research priorities in the draft east coast Spanish mackerel fishery harvest strategy address the key gaps in the management of this fishery?

- Strongly agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly disagree

Information and research priorities outlined in the draft harvest strategy are based on stakeholder feedback and address key knowledge gaps. Research priorities include shark depredation and other sources of fishing mortality, improving the calculation of catch rates, better understanding the effect of environmental conditions on recruitment, and developing indicators of fishery performance that are independent of fishing data.

Please provide a reason for your response:

Question 9. Do you think that the proposed monitoring and assessment schedule is sufficient to determine stock recovery and respond accordingly?

- Strongly agree Agree Undecided Disagree Strongly disagree

The next stock assessment is planned for 2026–27 to allow the stock to start rebuilding before any further management actions are considered. Based on the biology of the species, this is the earliest that a stock assessment would be able to detect the impact of new management actions. Other indicators of stock recovery (such as catch rates and total harvest) will also be monitored annually to assess the performance of rebuilding strategies.

Please provide a reason for your response:

Question 10. Are there any measures that you think could assist with the implementation of the proposed management action?

Feedback is sought to assist with implementation because under either proposed option, there will be impacts on all fishers.

Question 11. Do you have any other feedback or comments?

We thank you for your submission. Your time in providing feedback on an important management process is of great value to building partnerships and stakeholder engagement that will protect and recover a valuable common resource.