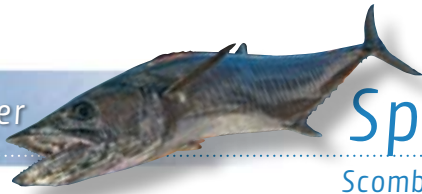


Dashing Drag Racer



Spanish Mackerel

Scomberomorus commerson

The Spanish Mackerel is the greyhound of the ocean. Not blessed with stamina, mackerel are all about the hit and blistering first run that will test your gear and your skill. These exciting game fish occupy coastal waters from Geographe Bay northwards and spaniards are taken offshore from boats during the late summer months in southern waters. In the tropical and sub-tropical waters north of Kalbarri, spaniards are caught all year round.



There are several closely related mackerel in WA but the most popular is the Narrow-Barred Spanish Mackerel and that's the one we'll concentrate on here.

Scientific Information

Spanish Mackerel are common in the warm water areas of the Indo-Pacific region and, in the past, only occasional catches were recorded around the southern Perth metropolitan area down to Busselton.

In recent times, however, they have tended to be a fish that can be targeted over summer through most of the WA coastline to Cape Leeuwin. Rather than school in deep water areas, most macks are caught in reasonably shallow waters to 20m around structures like coral reefs, rocky bommie systems and will often follow current lines when hunting or travelling.

As one of the most fierce of WA's pelagic species, they hunt schools of baitfish and tear them apart

with a set of amazing dentures that would make a barracuda proud.

They grow very fast and start life in reasonably large schools. As the fish grow, the school sizes decrease to the point where a fully grown adult may hunt alone or in pairs. They do, however, congregate in large numbers to spawn in the tropical areas of the region.

Studies by Fisheries WA show the catch rates in the December to March months to be much lower than the June to October months in the areas north of Carnarvon. In Perth, the peak fishing months are January and February and in recent years we've seen fish hanging around in numbers until March and early April before showing up soon after close to shore in Jurien.

How to Catch Them

Trolling lures and baits is the most popular way of catching these predatorial, fast moving hunters and they commonly hit baits being trolled for marlin and sailfish. As with most predatory pelagics, trolling baits will be more productive but their aggressive nature generally means lure fishing is going to produce almost as many fish on most occasions.

Being a coastal fish they are also targeted by land based anglers who

(course, require an offshore breeze).

Whilst getting started can be expensive with gas prices, cylinder hire and large balloons, it is a very exciting method of fishing. A well balanced gas balloon rig causes the bait to skip on the surface of the water — sometimes leaving it altogether and splashing down many metres away.

Spaniards chase baitfish with great speed which causes the small fish to leave the water to get away at times (most well known at this are flying fish

which are also on the spaniard's diet).

Mackerel will sometimes leap high from the water to catch them and will do the same to your bait and this can be one of the most exciting forms of fishing in the world. Most ballooning anglers can tell you stories of baits being as high as two metres above the water when hit.

When up north, it's often a good idea to not waste expensive fuel on trolling for mackerel. Instead, try to get a rough guide as to the areas you're likely to find mackerel and look for bommies in the 16–25m range. Drop your anchor then attach a 50cm wire trace to your hooks (more about them later).

On the mainline above the swivel, attach a slice of styrofoam. Do this by slicing two indents either side of the foam then wrap your main line around a couple of times. When a feeding mackerel comes along, it will take the

OPPOSITE LEFT: Point Samson regularly produces some of the country's biggest and meanest macks
LEFT: Be nice in this life or you'll come back as a baitfish

BELOW: Steve Pankhurst does his best mackie impersonation but he just can't get the teeth right



catch them from beaches, jetties, groyne and cliffs. Some of the hot spots for LBG (Land Based Game) anglers chasing macks include Steep Point (south west of Denham, Shark Bay) and off the cliffs at Quobba Station (north of Carnarvon).

Fishing from high rock platforms and cliffs, spaniards are taken on baits and lures but the most popular method for fishing from these spots is “ballooning” either gas (helium) or surface balloons.

Surface ballooning entails inflating a party balloon and using it, more or less, like a big float to drift your bait out with the wind or current. Gas ballooning uses a lighter than air gas like helium or a helium / nitrogen mix to provide lift which keeps your bait on the surface of the water and acts as a sail so the wind can blow the whole rig offshore quickly (you do, of





BELOW: Did you realise that spanish mackerel are regularly caught from Augusta to the far north of WA every year ... including plenty this size from around Perth! Many thanks to Nick Hocking (pictured) for super mackie info in this section

depend upon your baits. Dead baits should always be rigged with gangs of 10/0's but live baits can be attached with either a single 12/0 in the back of the neck or even a couple of free swinging 12/0's with the extra hook in the tail. This is because it's common to get a mackie ripping live baits in half and missing the single hook completely. They rarely just swallow the lot.

Another method when fishing

Nick Hocking's 5 tips for catching Super Spaniards

1. Use a flashing teaser such as Pakula Witch Doctor. This attracts fish from much greater distances than a normal spread of lures.
2. Target areas that you know will produce fish.
3. Look for water temperature changes, current lines and bait activity - all will produce mackerel.
4. Try picking up boat speed every now and then. The change of pace often triggers lazy fish into striking.
5. Run a variety of colours and don't be fooled into thinking mackerel will only eat red and white. A colour I only use on dull cloudy days!



bait and the line will snap the foam leaving a straight line fight. This stops the common problem of balloons that won't burst or leave the line.

Remember to pick the foam up after the fish is landed and normal air filled balloons are an alternative. You may also want to try fishing the upcurrent side of the bottom structure as the macks attack the food pushed up in the current rising over the reef.

The choice of hooks is going to

the far north is to find a "run" of fast moving tidal water and troll down that. Macks are very often sitting there out of sight and will fight very hard in this situation. Lures like River2Sea Triho Min 180s are most effective and the middle of the dry season will produce the best results.

Around Perth, most mackies are taken at the back of Rottnest Island's west end which is rich in food for schools of smaller fish.

Trolling here is the way to go because NW blowies are tending to ruin live baits quickly these days.

Most people start trolling around Cape Vlamingh and work their way through to Fish Hook Bay past 'The Chicken Run'. Depths here are from 6-18m and this is ideal mackie water but do be careful of swells and hidden reef which can make boating hazardous.

The Leeuwin Current would have to be the main contributing factor to

spaniard numbers around Rottneest as it flushes huge amounts of nutrient rich warm water down our coastline, making it fairly easy to see when the mackerel might arrive. Weather and water temperature printouts are available over the internet through the Department of Meteorology and although they are expensive, certainly play a vital role in finding metro mackerel.

Water temperatures between 22.5 and 24 degrees are what to look for but it doesn't happen very often. The entire season depends on how close the current pushes down. Pelagic species such as macks use these ocean currents to travel and not only does this make their journey a little easier, but quite often lands them in some very unusual areas such as Perth.

Generally you will find them in this area between twelve and thirty meters of water in places with good bait activity, structure, steep dropoffs and/or pinnacles. Finding these elusive areas is simply a matter of time and effort.

The 3 Mile Reef, which runs along our coast between Mandurah and Jurien Bay, is as good a place as any to start, especially in the northern suburbs. The back edge of the reef runs between 10 and 25 metres and is dotted with peaks and pinnacles all the way along.

Large bait schools also congregate in this area, making it a perfect haunt for these super predators. Big blue

mackerel, trevally, yellowtail and pilchards are all available here and you just would not believe the things that come in to feed on them at times.

The reefs offshore of Hillarys and Yanchep provide a lot of great mackerel action over summer. If you have a sounder, troll around the reefs until you see an area where baitfish are concentrated. This is the area to work with your lures. If you can't fish baitfish, it's better to anchor with a live herring or yellowtail and wait for something to come along.

Another good mackie spot not far from Ocean Reef and Mindarie is the Gemini Wreck. More famous for samsonfish, the Gemini is also worth trolling for mackerel all year round, with summer in particular a time that a lot of macks are caught.

After Easter, mackerel tend to start to make the journey further north and Jurien Bay has become quite a hotspot. They congregate along the back of the islands not too far offshore and trolling can produce several fish in each session during the peak of the north migration.

Being a very fast swimming fish, spanish mackerel are capable of taking 200 to 400 metres of line off of a reel against even a heavy drag, so reels with a good line capacity are recommended. Boat fishers tell tales of being spooled by a running mack

before the anchor can be raised.

LBG makes it even harder as you cannot chase them to regain line and you often have 100 to 200 metres of line out to begin with. While very much sprinters that tire out after a couple of medium length runs, a large fish will often slog it out for ages at the end of a 400 or 500 metre run.

Ranked as one of the great light tackle sportfish, the spanish mackerel is also a fine table fish. Its white, oily flesh has a subtle flavour and can be prepared in a variety of ways from barbequed cutlets to fish curries or deep fried fillets. Because of the high oil content, it also keeps very well in the freezer.

While many people rave about cutlets of mackerel, a good alternative is to take a side fillet and remove the blood line, giving four triangular fillets per fish which can be sliced in 1cm fillets at a 45 degree angle giving a lot of same sized fillets. The yield of meat to fish weight of mackerel is up around 80% which easily beats most large headed bottom fish.

Yes, mackies make the trip to our north west worthwhile even if you catch nothing else, but if you are dedicated you can catch your share from Perth. All you need to do is get out there and try but don't forget to read the fishingwa.com fishing reports each week over summer to be first to know when they're schooling.

