**SCIENTIFIC NAME**

*Scomber australasicus*

**SPECIES NAME(S)**

Blue mackerel

**COMMON NAMES**

chub mackerel, Common mackerel, English mackerel, Pacific mackerel, School mackerel, slimy mackerel, southern mackerel, spotted mackerel

**STOCK IDENTIFICATION**

Blue mackerel (*Scomber australisicus*) are a schooling pelagic species that occur in tropical and temperate waters of the Pacific Ocean. They can be found to depths of 200 m over the continental shelf, although juveniles inhabit inshore waters and shallower waters. Fishing for blue mackerel in the Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF) has historically been focused off southeast NSW, eastern Tasmania and South Australia. Almost all small pelagic stocks are multijurisdictional (that is, managed by both the Australian and state governments) under Offshore Constitutional Settlement arrangements (AFMA (Australian Fisheries Management Authority) 2017). The fishery uses midwater trawl and purse seine gear, but purse seine catches have been negligible for the past several years.

The stock structure of blue mackerel is uncertain. Genetic analysis of samples from southern Queensland, Western Australia and New Zealand indicates population subdivision. Genetic differences have been detected between Western Australia and Queensland, and between Western Australia and New Zealand (Schmarr et al. 2007; Whittington et al. 2012). No finer-scale analyses of blue mackerel have been undertaken to further define stock structure. Blue mackerel within the SPF is assessed and managed as separate stocks in the eastern and western subareas (ABARES (Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences) 2017). This profile focuses on the fishery in the eastern subarea.

The Commonwealth Small Pelagic Fishery (SPF) extends from southern Queensland to southern Western Australia. The fishery includes purse-seine and midwater trawl fishing vessels. Historically state vessels have accounted for the majority of the catch, but with the introduction of a new freezer vessel, the catch of blue mackerel by Commonwealth vessels increased in the 2015–16 fishing season, and the Commonwealth trawl fishery now accounts for the majority of the species harvest (AFMA (Australian Fisheries Management Authority) 2017). Catches in the state fisheries of New South Wales, Victoria, and Tasmania were small enough in 2016–2017 to not have been reported separately (rather, were lumped with other species as “other”), and Commonwealth purse seine catches were not reported and presumed negligible. For that reason, separate profiles for the state fisheries are not included in this profile, and a single gear, midwater trawls, is assessed in this profile.

This fishery entered full assessment by the Marine Stewardship Council system in September 2014, but withdrew in 2016.

**RELATED LINKS**

- Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA)

**ASSESSMENT**

**Strengths**

- Effort has been low in the fishery for several years (2009–2017) and the 2014 estimate of spawning biomass was double that estimated in the last survey in 2004.
- The harvest strategy is precautionary and tailored to the targeted species and ecosystem.
- Ecological impacts of the fishery have been studied recently and the chance of the fishery triggering a trophic cascade has been deemed low.

**Weaknesses**

- Quotas for blue mackerel in this fishery have been raised over fourfold between 2016–2017 and 2017–2018. Information on the impact of this rise in effort on bycatch species has not yet been published.
- The fishery is known to interact with several ETP marine mammals, seabirds, and sharks, and information about impacts to these species is not comprehensive.
- Mid-water trawls are known to have some contact with bottom habitat, but impacts of this fishery on the ocean floor are not well studied.

**Options**

- Update research on the fishery’s impact on ETP marine mammals, seabirds, and sharks, taking account of raised effort in the fishery.
- If fishery effort rises significantly, as quotas recently have, explore spatial management approaches to protect sensitive habitats from trawl bottom contact.

**SCORES**

**Management Quality:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Management Strategy</th>
<th>Manager Compliance</th>
<th>Fishers Compliance</th>
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<tr>
<td>≥ 8</td>
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**Stock Health:**

<table>
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<th>Future Health</th>
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<td>≥ 6</td>
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**FIPS**

- No related FIPs

**MSC**

- South East Australia small pelagic fish (commonwealth) mid-water trawl
  - MSC Certified