




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR HILL

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ADJOURNMENT

Spanish Mackerel Fishery

 **Mr KNUTH** (Hill—KAP) (7.18 pm): I rise to express my concern about the potential closure of the Spanish Mackerel Fishery next year by Fisheries Queensland. Spanish mackerel is high in demand. If you walk into any fish and chip shop in North Queensland and ask for crumbed or battered fish, there is an 80 per cent chance you will get Spanish mackerel. However, the fishery could be closed after a meeting held by the East Coast Spanish Mackerel Working Group. The report is available on the department's website. I table the report.

Tabled paper: Department of Agriculture and Fisheries communique, dated 17-18 May 2021, regarding the closure of the Spanish Mackerel Fishery [891](#).

The report reveals flaws in either the management or the assessment of stock levels in the fishery. In the report, the commercial harvest of Spanish mackerel since 2004 has averaged 300 tonnes annually, almost half the allowable limit. Even if we add 170 tonnes from recreational fishers, it is still well below the commercial annual quota limit.

According to DAF's last stock assessment of Australian east coast Spanish mackerel in 2018, it clearly states that the result suggests annual harvests of around 550 tonnes across all sectors will build the biomass towards the 60 per cent level. If 550 tonnes of Spanish mackerel are harvested annually, stock levels should be maintained at 60 per cent. However, three years later, fishers are being told that levels are now at only 17 per cent. Anything under 20 per cent would trigger the closure of the fishery, which has every commercial and recreational fisher and business owner worried.

How is it possible that the Spanish mackerel stock levels have fallen to 17 per cent if, according to Fisheries Queensland, total fishing has been well below the annual commercial quota since 2004? Either Fisheries Queensland has had the management so wrong for 17 years and should be held accountable or the process used to measure the correct stock status is seriously flawed and incorrect. I understand the stock assessment is currently under an independent scientific peer review. If this review confirms the 17 per cent biomass assessment, then the government is liable for compensation to commercial fishers and related businesses because of 17 years of mismanagement of the fishery. I urge the minister to ensure no rash decisions are made on the fishery by using incorrect or flawed data.