



Speech By  
**Stephen Andrew**


**MEMBER FOR MIRANI**

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Record of Proceedings, 28 November 2023

**FISHERIES LEGISLATION (SPANISH MACKEREL AND BAR ROCKCOD)  
AMENDMENT DECLARATION**

**Disallowance of Statutory Instrument**

 **Mr ANDREW** (Mirani—PHON) (6.18 pm): Back in the early days, when I was about 20 years old, which is not so long ago, in the Mackay area there were 58 boats, and about five of those boats specialised in fishing for Spanish mackerel. I find it very difficult to understand the stock assessment that has been done. Most of those boats were never on the logbook system. As we went further forward, the fishing industry turned to trout and live fisheries and most of that live fishery did not include Spanish mackerel. The people who were catching trout and other fish were not interested in Spanish mackerel because they were not worth as much as the other fish that the boats were set up to catch. The stock assessment really concerns me. It goes back to 1912. I do not even know if there was a 4225-D made by Mustad back then or even a freezer on a boat to be able to understand what bringing in Spanish mackerel in 1912 looked like. It makes it very difficult to understand.

Another issue is that Spanish mackerel are not easy to catch. It is a specialist area in the fishing game. People need to know what they are doing and understand when and where they going to be. They move from the outer reef to the inner reef to the islands. When they are smaller in size, they go around the islands. They are a different fish when it comes to them going through their life. I find it unreal that we can do a stock assessment on a fish that we know little about. I know that there have been times that they have said, 'Yes, all the VMS data that comes in shows that there are not a lot of Spanish mackerel coming through.' There is not because no-one is catching them. No-one wants to catch them. They are all catching the fish that everyone wants to eat and are worth money to them—that is, trout, red emperor, nannygai, reef fish and red throat. People like Kevvie Milkins, Eddie Clark and Robbie Hughlands who fished from their boats *Born Free* and *Wayward Wind* fished on their own. They did not take a lot of Spanish mackerel because they could not handle them. They did not fish with other people because other people actually scared the fish away. They knew how to handle this breed of fish. They had small little skiffs with two-cylinder diesel engines that operated quietly. They pulled X amount of fish a day—probably no more than 50—and went home and processed them with love and care. They went back with some of the best eating fish you would ever find.

The stock assessments cannot be right because there is no information over the 58 boats and the small percentage of catch of Spanish mackerel that the government's quota is based on. It is totally sustainable. Last year, it took Wally Fisler and Chris McNamara four weeks to catch what it usually takes them six months to catch. The actual number of fish out there is way more than the government realises. The next thing we will see is a black market being driven by other people who seek to go out and catch this fish and see a hole in the system. We have not yet seen that. It is about to come. Is it happening at the moment?

The second part of this is that we are virtually saying, 'Oh yeah, we are going to stop catching them, but we will let other countries which do not manage their fishing industry, which use unsustainable

practices and which even use slave labour to catch fish import this fish back into our country.' We do not know how this fish has been handled or taken. No-one understands any of it. There are no closures or anything. How can that be a sustainable fishery and how can we say that we have done assessments?

The recreational fishers do not even catch Spanish mackerel. They are not silly. These fish are hard to catch. One out of 20 boats would bring home a Spanish mackerel. Most boats do not even hold an esky big enough to put a Spanish mackerel in let alone catch one. People do not realise that this is the norm. I am a recreational and professional fisher. I still hold a professional licence. When people catch a Spanish mackerel, they will take one to feed most of the village or most of the family for that night. They do not take a lot.

The Spanish mackerel fishery was never in danger. The modelling programs are another interesting factor. We know that modelling programs have a certain allowance for error built into them. I have spoken to people in Cardno who have said that some of these modelling programs are up to 48 per cent in error, and that compounds. Instead of the odds being like tossing a coin and being 50-50, they are actually 95-5 when it comes to errors with this kind of modelling. The government is using a program to model a fish that no-one is actually catching. There are a small number of professionals who take these fish and the government is saying, 'Given the VMS data across the whole fleet we know they are not taking any of this fish.' Of course they are not taking any fish. They do not take those fish because they are not worth what the other finfish are. If they do not take Spanish mackerel, then there will be a black market for them. We will see that.

It is a shame that the government does not understand this outcome. That is the way it will be given the modelling process. I cannot get over it. I have spoken to so many professional fishermen who are dedicated to Spanish mackerel. Find out how many fish they catch because they are the ones who know exactly what the situation is. They actually look after them. They try not to go to the places where they are like Rib and Keeper off Townsville and where the spawning process happens. They do not want to take them because they want it to be better for themselves.

Why would we say no to an industry that has done so much for us? The fishing industry took us through the war. It ensures we are not dependent on other countries and it also keeps us away—

**Mr Molhoek:** Food security.

**Mr ANDREW:** Yes, it gives us food security that we should always have. I thought the UN said that we should never back away from food security or create a situation where we lack food security. I spoke in estimates about the situation with the mackerel fishery and what is happening with the reef. Are we trading the Spanish mackerel fishing industry so we can keep tourism going in this country? If we are, that is blackmail. We should never back down. These people are not destroying an industry that they protected for all those years. The industry has been minimised. We hardly have anyone catching Spanish mackerel. I cannot see how it is overfished and I cannot see the recreational sector taking them as well.

The information I have here shows that using the value suggested by the peer review there could easily be three times as many mackerel as Queensland fisheries are stating, meaning the fishery is actually not in any trouble. The Queensland fishing industry body, QSA, commissioned its own peer review of Spanish mackerel stock assessment. The reviewer discovered huge discrepancies in the government's assessment on which the new rules are based. The report concludes—

We find that the model shows signs of misspecification, with residual trends in the decadal CPUE time series, age structure and length composition data, bias apparent in the estimated growth curve, and instability in model fits and the likelihood profiles.

It is on the basis of these faulty models that—

... Fisheries Queensland is cutting the total allowable catch for professional fishers ... from 578 tonne this year to just 165 tonnes in the 2023-24 financial year.

Guesstimates and unverified assumptions are not how our fisheries resources should be managed. People's livelihoods should not be ruined. These families go back a long way. I know that when I first started catching fish a lot of the fishermen would not even talk about how to catch Spanish mackerel. A lot of the specialist Spanish mackerel fishermen would talk to the people doing deep-sea fishing and say, 'You can take all the marks we have for the deep-sea fishing—no problems—because we do not fish for Spanish. You can go and catch all the Spanish you want.' That is what the professional deep-sea fishermen used to say to the Spanish mackerel fishermen. I was standing on the wharf with Jimmy Edwards when we were giving the marks over. I was yelling out the coordinates.

It goes to show that that whole fishing fraternity shared the industry and did not destroy it. One was fishing the bottom and one was fishing the pelagic mid-water fish as the Spanish mackerel are, and today there is just about no-one left. What is left is being destroyed by faulty science. We are bowing down to unelected governments from overseas that have no right to speculate on something that does not exist. I do not believe it exists. I have skin in the game. I have caught more in a day than there are members in this House. I still have scars on my fingers from the day we changed the quota from six to one, because I went out and caught the first six in the first half day on my own. There is no shortage of Spanish mackerel; there is a shortage of science. That is the issue we have in this place.