The sand mackerel has a nice oily, firm flesh similar to the common mackerel, just a little classier in some way as it stays firm for longer and has a lot more shine to the body. The fantastic silvery shine on its side and underbelly makes it irresistible to most predatory game fish, sharks and rays. Sand mackerel works fantastically well up the north coast of Natal and has often made the difference of being the first bait to get a pull when anglers are standing in a bunch.

Sand mackerel is caught on mackerel jigs and also netted in the Durban bay by the local netters. I picked these ones up from Barry Wareham at Basil Manning, who has normally got some fresh or freshly frozen in stock, on my recent trip to Durban. A sand mackerel rigged with a 9/0 Daiichi circle will make one of the best baits on the coast.

**Step 1**
I use a 9/0 Daiichi circle tied onto some nylon-coated wire to avoid the bite-offs. You can go smaller on the circle but I find that when using a smaller size, the bigger sharks can tail-wrap the leader and open the hooks. Start by slicing the mackerel with a super-sharp knife down from just behind the head to the back to the tip of the base of the fish’s tail, keeping the stomach intact.

**Step 2**
Cutting the fish this way will give you maximum belly shine and this will help to bring a quick bite. Start by pricking the hook at an angle right at the tip of the lips to give you maximum hook exposure and to help set the hook when you get the bite.

**Step 3**
Having a long cut helps the exposed side of the bait fish to release as much oil and blood as possible into the water to attract sharks, fish and rays onto your bait quickly.

**Step 4**
Find a working bank and place the bait on the edge, making sure your drag is properly set, and get ready to have line stretched off your reel. This is one of the most exciting bait types to have in your cooler box when the flat fish are lurking near the banks of the Tugela region on those hot summers days.

I saw my first sand mackerel when I moved to Durban in the early nineties. We don’t get or even use them in the Eastern Cape but it is one of the best warm-water baits I have ever used for giant sandies, diamond rays, honeycomb rays, grey sharks, blackfin sharks and couta, both from the boat and from the side.
BAIT REVIEW: SAND MACKEREL

Step 1

Step 2

Step 3

Step 4