

DRAFT

**JOINT SAFMC/GMFMC MACKEREL
SCOPING DOCUMENT**

**AMENDMENT 19
TO THE COASTAL MIGRATORY
PELAGICS FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**South Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council
Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council**

MAY 2007

INTRODUCTION

The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC), the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC), and the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC) are preparing to amend the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan (FMP). The primary action under consideration would divide the FMP into separate Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Migratory Pelagic Fishery Management Plans. The South Atlantic and Gulf of Mexico Councils previously indicated their intent to establish separate Fishery Management Plans in Amendment 8/EA implemented in March 1998.

In creating two plans, the Councils must determine the management structure (species, boundary lines, how fish are counted, etc.) and the permit system. These actions would affect the following seven species:

- (1) Bluefish, *Pomatomus saltatrix* (Gulf of Mexico only)
- (2) Cero, *Scomberomorus regalis*
- (3) Cobia, *Rachycentron canadum*
- (4) Dolphin*, *Coryphaena hippurus*
- (5) King mackerel, *Scomberomorus cavalla*
- (6) Little tunny, *Euthynnus alleteratus*
- (7) Spanish mackerel, *Scomberomorus maculatus*

*Note: Dolphin in the South Atlantic, Mid-Atlantic, and New England Fishery Management Councils' jurisdictions are managed under the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery Management Plan (January 2003) with the southern boundary at the border between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils.

Each Council has a number of additional management actions they want to consider and have indicated their intent to evaluate additional management alternatives after completion of this joint amendment to establish separate fishery management plans. The public is encouraged to focus on the actions outlined in this scoping document for Amendment 19.

PURPOSE FOR TAKING ACTION

Separate fishery management plans would address the following:

(1) Ecosystem-Based Management - the South Atlantic Council desires to coordinate all fishery management regulations and policies within the Council's area of jurisdiction, or as close to this as is practicable, through development of a Fishery Ecosystem Plan and Comprehensive Amendment.

(2) Different Management Philosophies - different philosophies exist between the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils. A number of the Magnuson-Stevens Act criteria and risk levels are specified at different levels in the Atlantic.

(3) Reduce Duplication and Minimize Costs - separate fishery management plans would eliminate the need for joint approval of amendments, especially those where actions may only affect one Council's area of jurisdiction. This change would expedite approval of proposed management measures. It would also reduce the need for affected fishermen and interested

members of the public to travel to each Council's meetings to protect their interests in the fishery. These meetings range from Texas to Florida to North Carolina through New York. Separate management plans would greatly reduce the level of inconvenience and cost to the public. Separate fishery management plans would also speed up the management process by eliminating delays in the review and implementation stages resulting from both Councils having to review and approve actions as happened with the previous two mackerel amendments.

Modifying the permit requirements for king and Spanish mackerel to create separate commercial permits would better differentiate individuals for data collection and enforcement purposes. The increased costs of requiring separate permits will be evaluated should the Councils go forward with Amendment 19.

ACTIONS FOR SCOPING

ACTION 1. SPECIFY THE FOLLOWING CHANGES TO THE MANAGEMENT STRUCTURE (SPECIES, BOUNDARY LINES, HOW FISH ARE COUNTED, ETC.) FOR COASTAL MIGRATORY PELAGICS

Option 1. No Action. Retain the current management boundary lines for species in the Fishery Management Unit (FMU) (Figures 1 and 2).

Option 2. Establish a fixed boundary for all Coastal Migratory Pelagics at the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line on the Florida East Coast corresponding to the existing Spanish mackerel fixed boundary (Figure 2).

Discussion

After the Gulf and South Atlantic Councils' March 2007 meetings, the NMFS SEFSC informed the Councils that all future assessments must be based on the best available science about mixing and migratory group boundaries at the time each assessment is conducted. The Councils' discussed this with the SEFSC and SERO and agreed that the following approach would be presented to each Council for approval at their June 2007 meetings:

1. Future assessments would be done with the best available science on mixing and migratory group boundaries at the time the assessment is conducted.
2. Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA) parameters (e.g., maximum sustainable yield, overfishing and overfished levels, etc.) will be provided for the Gulf and Atlantic Migratory Groups as defined using the most current data on mixing and migratory group boundaries.
3. The 2008 SEDAR 16 assessment will provide an Atlantic Allowable Biological Catch (ABC) for king mackerel based on counting all fish north of a line at the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line as Atlantic fish and a Gulf ABC for king mackerel based on counting all fish south of this line as Gulf fish. In addition, for the 2008 SEDAR assessment, ABC values will be provided for the Atlantic and Gulf Migratory Groups as currently defined (i.e., using the shifting seasonal boundary; Figure 1) but counting all fish in the winter mixing zone (Flagler/Volusia county line through the

Monroe/Collier county line) as Gulf fish and also counting 50% of the fish in the winter mixing zone as Gulf fish. This will provide continuity as the Councils evaluate changes resulting from the SEDAR assessment.

The Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources of the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic (FMP), approved in 1982 and implemented by regulations effective in February of 1983, treated king and Spanish mackerel each as one U.S. stock. The present management regime under **Option 1** for mackerel recognizes two migratory groups of king and Spanish mackerel, the Gulf Migratory Group and the Atlantic Migratory Group. King mackerel from these two groups seasonally mix on the East Coast of Florida. For management and assessment purposes, a boundary between groups of king mackerel (Figure 1) was specified as the Volusia/Flagler County border on the Florida east coast in the winter (November 1 - March 31) and the Monroe/Collier County border on the Florida southwest coast in the summer (April 1 - October 31).

Spanish mackerel mix in south Florida but abundance trends along each coast of Florida are different indicating sufficient isolation between the two migratory groups. The boundary for Spanish mackerel is fixed at the Miami-Dade/Monroe County border on Florida's southeast coast (Figure 2).

The most recent cobia stock assessment (Williams 2001) indicated that there is very little mixing of cobia found in the Gulf and cobia from the Atlantic, and this mixing primarily occurs in the Florida Keys in winter. Prior to this recent analysis, cobia were believed to extensively mix in the Gulf and Atlantic, thus the councils adopted the following language in its Generic SFA Amendment: "For stocks, such as cobia, where scientific information indicates it is a common stock that migrates through the Gulf and South Atlantic jurisdictions, both Councils must concur on the recommendations."

This action would set a fixed management boundary for all stocks in the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan at the Miami-Dade/Monroe County line.

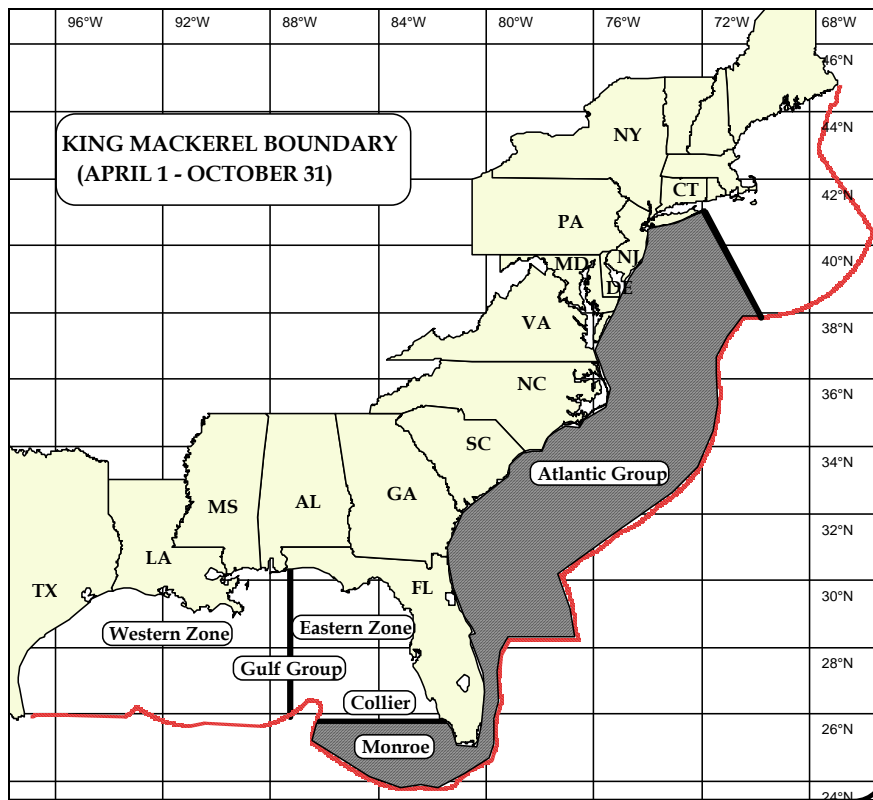
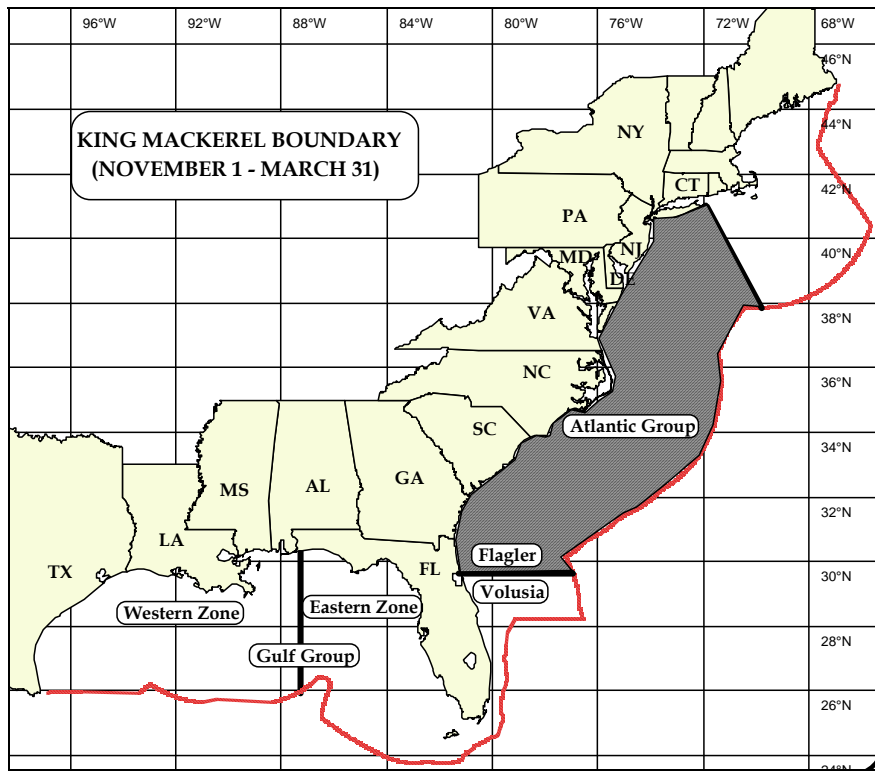


Figure 1. Seasonal boundary between Atlantic and Gulf Migratory Groups of king mackerel. (Source: Council Staff)



Figure 2. Boundary between Atlantic and Gulf Migratory Groups of Spanish mackerel. (Source: Council Staff)

ACTION 2. MODIFY THE EXISTING REQUIREMENTS FOR SEPARATE COMMERCIAL PERMITS FOR KING MACKEREL (CURRENTLY UNDER A MORATORIUM) AND SPANISH MACKEREL.

Option 1. No action.

Option 2. Modify the existing requirements by establishing separate commercial and charter/headboat permits for the Atlantic and Gulf based on the fixed boundary.

Option 2A. For king mackerel, the Councils are considering grandfathering in all existing permit holders who have historically landed in both areas to get a dual permit; when transferred to another individual it becomes either a Gulf or Atlantic permit.

Discussion

Costs of any changes in permit requirements will be analyzed should the Councils go forward with Amendment 19.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

The GMFMC will review and approve the scoping document at their June 4-7, 2007 meeting, and the SAFMC will review and approve at their June 10-15, 2007 meeting. Scoping meetings/hearings will be held during July and August 2007. The SAFMC will then review the draft document and approve for public hearings at their September 17-21, 2007 meeting, and the GMFMC will do the same at their November 12-15, 2007 meeting. Public hearings would then be held during December 2007 and January 2008. Both Councils will review and approve the document for formal review by the Secretary of Commerce at their March 2008 meetings.

We cannot estimate what the likely SFA parameters will be for the Gulf and Atlantic Migratory Groups, and we cannot estimate what the likely Gulf and Atlantic ABC values will be until results from the benchmark 2008 SEDAR 16 assessment are available. The current timing for SEDAR 16 – King Mackerel is as follows:

- A. Data Workshop – January 14-18, 2008 in Charleston, SC
- B. Assessment Workshop – May 5-9, 2008 in Miami, FL
- C. Review Workshop – August 11-15, 2008 in Atlanta, GA

The Councils' Scientific and Statistical Committees would then review the SEDAR results; the SAFMC SSC meets in December 2008 and the South Atlantic Council would consider their SSC recommendations at their December 2008 meeting. Each Council will then determine how to implement the necessary changes.

PUBLIC SCOPING INPUT

The Councils are accepting written and email scoping comments until _____.

Scoping meetings/hearings will be held at the following locations:

(add after each Council indicates when and where they want to hold scoping meetings)

REFERENCES

Williams, E. H. 2001. Assessment of cobia, *Rachycentron canadum*, in the waters of the U.S. Gulf of Mexico. U.S. Dept. Commerce. NOAA Center for Coastal Fisheries and Habitat Research, 101 Pivers Island Road, Beaufort, NC 28516-9722. 55pgs.