

Port Meetings for the Commercial and Recreational King and Spanish Mackerel Fisheries



Decision Document

Background

During their April 2019 meeting and their October 2022 meeting, the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel (AP) passed motions requesting the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council) set up a series of port meetings to gather more information on the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel fisheries. In the past, the South Atlantic Council acknowledged the importance of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the commercial and recreational king and Spanish mackerel fisheries and how port meetings may provide an effective avenue to achieve that understanding. There are currently several efforts underway for coastal migratory pelagics that may benefit from a series of port meetings.

Revisions to the objectives in the Coastal Migratory Pelagics Fishery Management Plan

Like all Fishery Management Plans (FMPs), the FMP for Coastal Migratory Pelagics (CMP) in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Regions (CMP FMP) contains a series of objectives to guide management decisions. The objectives should balance the biological needs of the fish stocks with human need, reconcile both present and future costs and benefits, integrate both private and public interests, and provide for a comprehensive approach to addressing problems within the fishery.

As the needs of a fishery change over time, fishery management councils are encouraged to regularly reassess the FMP objectives (50 C.F.R. § 600.305(b)). Amendment 6 to the CMP FMP (1992) was the last amendment to modify the objectives of the CMP FMP. At recent meetings the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council) and South Atlantic Council have been working to revise the objectives to better fit the fishery as it operates today.

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Assessment Response

SEDAR 78 was completed in July 2022 and included an assessment for Atlantic Spanish mackerel. In August 2022, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) reviewed the results of the updated SEDAR 78 and recommended additional work completed. The Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC) reran the SEDAR 78 assessment model with new landings to address uncertainty with MRIP estimate in the terminal year. The SSC reviewed the changes at their October 2022 meeting and determined additional work remained necessary. A sub-group of the SSC will meet this winter to outline additional analysis request for the SEFSC with the goal of reviewing an updated assessment at their April 2023 meeting.

If that assessment is considered best scientific information available at the April 2023 SSC meeting, the amendment development schedule would be as follows:

October 2022	Mackerel Cobia AP discusses assessment.
April 2023	SSC reviews modifications to SEDAR 78.
June 2023	South Atlantic Council reviews SSC recommendations and directs staff to begin work on an amendment.
Fall 2023	Mackerel Cobia AP discusses amendment.
September 2023	South Atlantic Council reviews AP comments and directs staff on actions and alternatives to develop.
December 2023	South Atlantic Council reviews options paper and scoping comments, approves range of actions and alternatives to be analyzed.
March 2024	South Atlantic Council reviews draft document, provides direction to staff.
June 2024	South Atlantic Council reviews draft document, selects preferred alternatives, and approves for public hearings.
September 2024	South Atlantic Council reviews public comments.
December 2024	South Atlantic Council considers amendment for formal review.

False Albacore Management Request and White Paper

On September 19, 2022, the Council received a letter from the American Saltwater Guides Association requesting they consider re-adding false albacore to the CMP FMP. The Council directed staff to develop a white paper examining if false albacore meet the Magnuson Stevens Fisheries Conservation and Management Act (Magnuson Stevens Act) criteria for a species in need of conservation and management. This paper, which includes feedback from the Mackerel Cobia AP, will be presented to the Council at their December 2022 meeting.

Mackerel Cobia AP Request for an Atlantic king mackerel amendment

At their October 2022 meeting, the Mackerel Cobia AP requested the Council begin work on an amendment that would remove the current split season for Atlantic king mackerel in the southern zone. Management of Atlantic king mackerel is especially complex and in recent years has been subject to regular small management adjustments.

Why conducting port meetings for the Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel fishery may be beneficial.

- Port meetings would allow for thorough evaluation of current management objectives leading to a revised set of goals and objectives for the CMP FMP.
 - Would allow the Council to gather specific information from stakeholders.
 - Soliciting input promotes transparency and the Council’s intent to involve stakeholders in the management process.
 - Would allow stakeholders to bring forward creative management strategies to meet objectives.
- A comprehensive picture of mackerel fishery dynamics (such as stakeholders’ perceptions of management performance and how stakeholders are using the resource) would lead to improved management of both the recreational and commercial king and Spanish mackerel fisheries.
 - Information gathered during port meetings could be useful as the Council develops management for Atlantic Spanish mackerel in response to SEDAR 78.
 - The Mackerel Cobia AP has requested the Council also review aspects of Atlantic king mackerel management, which may benefit from stakeholder input.
 - Port meetings would allow the Council to gather additional information on the false albacore fishery to better inform discussions on the need for conservation and management.
- Consider how species moving/expanding northward in response to climate change is likely to impact future management of the mackerels via the CMP FMP.
- Others??

TENTATIVE timeline for completing a series of port meetings.

December 2022	Council directs staff to organize port meetings for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.
March 2022	Council reviews detailed plan for conducting port meetings.
April 2022	Mackerel Cobia AP meeting via webinar to review plan for conducting port meetings.
June 2022	Council reviews AP member input and approves plan for conducting port meetings.
Fall 2022	Port meetings being held throughout the Mid and South Atlantic regions. ¹
Winter 2023	Port meetings being held throughout the Mid and South Atlantic regions.
Spring 2024	Port meetings being held throughout the Mid and South Atlantic regions.
September 2024	Summary report prepared and presented to the Council.

¹ The Council could receive brief updates during Council meetings throughout the time when port meetings are actively being conducted.

Committee Action

Should staff move forward with planning for king and Spanish mackerel port meetings?

If so, is the proposed timeline acceptable?