

DECISION DOCUMENT

for

COASTAL MIGRATORY PELAGICS FRAMEWORK AMENDMENT 2 (Spanish Mackerel trip limits in the Florida EEZ)



**Ponte Vedra, FL
June 2014**

Background

Background: The South Atlantic Council is interested in ways to reduce the complexity of the current commercial trip limit system for Atlantic group Spanish mackerel in Florida waters and to maintain trip limits to meet management goals for the fishery, and had placed the action in South Atlantic Framework Action 2013. In June 2013 the Council approved a motion to move the action to a future amendment after the Spanish mackerel stock assessment was complete, and in March 2014 the Council directed staff to place the action in Framework Amendment 2.

A trip limit system for Florida waters including unlimited week days, in-season reductions in trip limits, and an adjusted quota for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel was implemented through Amendment 6 in 1992. The adjustment (250,000 lbs below the specific commercial ACL) was calculated based on the number of vessels and the catch rates at that time, and was intended to allow fishing by small vessels at 500 lbs for the rest of the year. However, both the number of vessels and the catch rates have changes in the past 20 years and may have reduced the effectiveness and necessity of the 250,000-lb adjustment.

When the current trip limit system for Florida waters was put in place the total allowable catch (TAC) for commercial harvest of Atlantic Spanish mackerel was 3.87 million pounds (mp). The current commercial annual catch limit (ACL) set in Amendment 18 is 3.13 mp, and the Council has proposed a commercial ACL of 3.33 mp in Framework Amendment 1. Both the current and proposed commercial ACLs are lower than the TAC that was in place when the trip limit system was implemented.

The allowance of unlimited catch in Florida waters on weekdays beginning December 1 may contribute to early closures in the spring under the lower commercial ACL. On the other hand, the trip limit reduction may help lengthen the open season, and may be retained but based on the full quota rather than the adjusted quota.

The system of trip limit reductions described above applies only to federal waters off Florida. If Amendment 20B is implemented, Northern and Southern Zones would be created for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel. The Southern Zone would include Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. Therefore, if any part of the current system of trip limit reductions for waters off Florida is retained, the Southern Zone will have different trip limits in different areas.

Atlantic Spanish Mackerel	Total ACL	Commercial ACL
Until 2011/12	7.04 MP	3.87 MP
2011/12 thru 2013/14	5.69 MP	3.13 MP
Proposed 2014-2016	6.063 MP	3.33 MP

Proposed 20B Zones	Northern Zone Quota	Southern Zone Quota
Proposed Comm ACL 2014-2016 = 6.063 MP	662,670 lbs	2,667,330 lbs

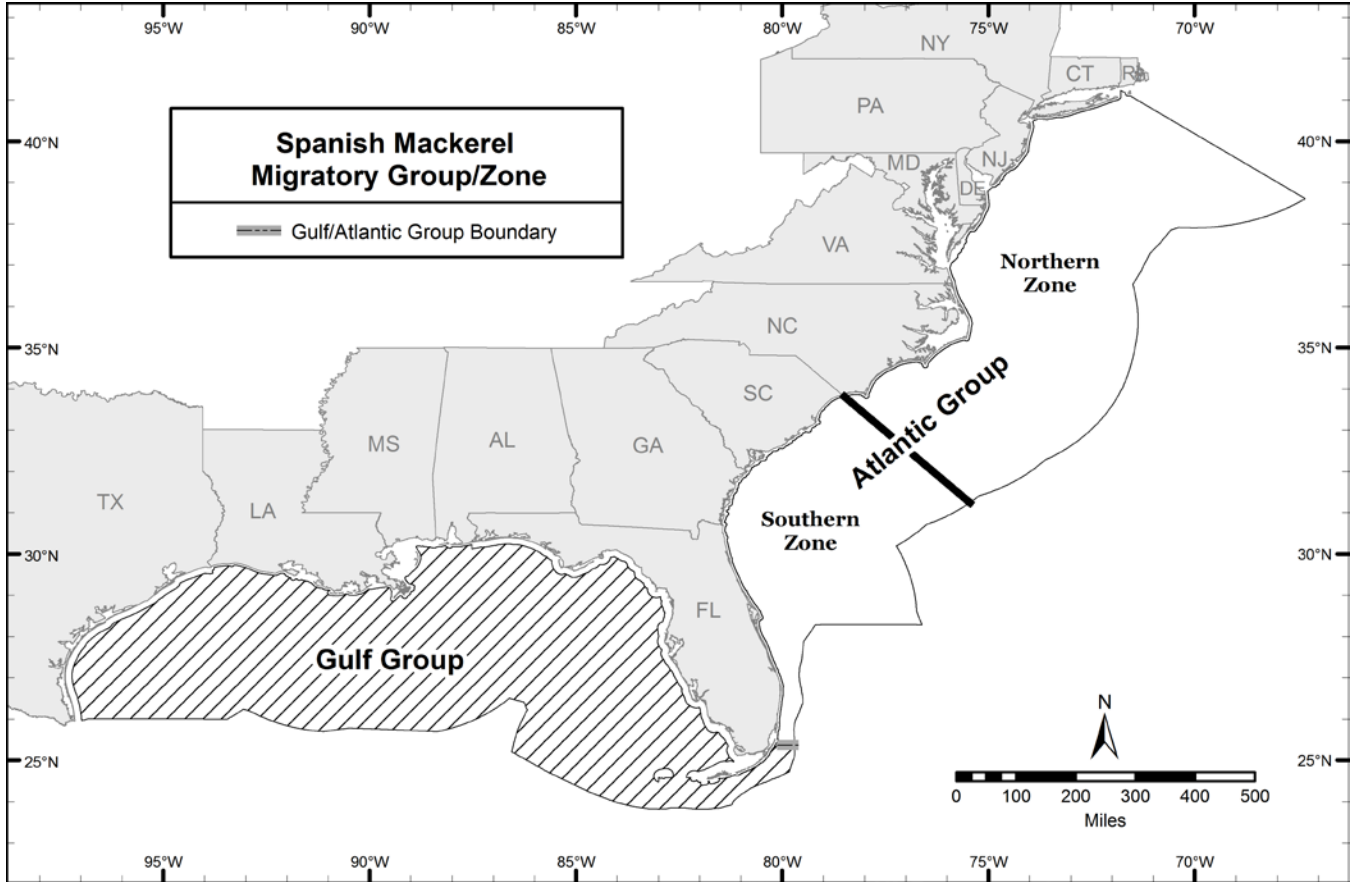


Figure 1. Fixed boundary between Atlantic and Gulf migratory groups of Spanish mackerel, with the proposed Northern and Southern Zones in the Atlantic Group (pending submission and approval of CMP Amendment 20B).

The map above illustrates what the proposed northern and southern zones would look like if Amendment 20B is implemented. If there continues to be a separate trip limit for waters off FL with a separate system of trip limit step-downs, there would be a sub-zone within the proposed southern zone that has different regulations than the rest of the southern zone. The Council may consider applying the preferred trip limit to the entire proposed southern zone to simplify the regulatory environment in that area.

Expected Schedule

June 2014 – South Atlantic Council review and select Preferred Alternative

September 2014 – Public hearing; South Atlantic Council approves for Secretarial Review

October 2014 - Gulf Council approves for Secretarial Review (if necessary, depends on implementation of Amendment 20B)

Early 2015 - Implementation

The current management objectives in the joint mackerel FMP as amended are:

1. The primary objective of this FMP is to stabilize yield at MSY, allow recovery of overfished populations, and maintain population levels sufficient to ensure adequate recruitment.
2. to provide a flexible management system for the resource which minimizes regulatory delay while retaining substantial Council and public input in management decisions and which can rapidly adapt to changes in resource abundance, new scientific information, and changes in fishing patterns among user groups or by areas.
3. to provide necessary information for effective management and establish a mandatory reporting system for monitoring catch.
4. to minimize gear and user group conflicts.
5. to distribute the TAC of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel between recreational and commercial user groups based on the catches that occurred during the early to mid-1970s, which is prior to the development of the deep water run-around gillnet fishery and when the resource was not overfished.
6. to minimize waste and bycatch in the fishery.
7. to provide appropriate management to address specific migratory groups of king mackerel.
8. to optimize the social and economic benefits of the coastal migratory pelagic fisheries.

[Draft] Purpose for Actions

The purpose of this amendment is to modify the current trip limit system for commercial harvest of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in the Florida EEZ.

[Draft] Need for Actions

The need for this amendment is to reduce complexity in the trip limit system while increasing social and economic benefits of the CMP fishery through sustainable and profitable harvest of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel.

Current Trip Limits for Atlantic group Spanish mackerel

	North of GA/FL boundary	Florida
March 1- Nov 30		3,500 lbs
Dec 1- Feb 28(29)	3,500 lbs	No limit if 0-74% adjusted quota has been landed weekdays, 1,500 lbs weekends
		1,500 lbs if 75-99% adjusted quota has been landed
		500 lbs if 100% adjusted quota has been landed
		0 lbs if 100% quota has been landed

History

- Amendment 6 (1992) - set up the trip limits with the current trip limit for north of the GA/FL boundary; and the Florida trip limit system using the adjusted quota, periods with unlimited trips, and step-downs
- Framework September 1996 – adjustments to when the unlimited trips could occur; implemented July 1997
- Framework July 1999- set up the current system but with the fishing year starting in April; implemented July 2000
- Amendment 15 (2004) - changed fishing year to start March 1
- Framework January 2008- adjusted the system to start the changing trip limits on December 1 through the end of the season

Step-downs

- Occurred in 1993, 1994, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2004, 2005
- 500-lb trip limit only in 1993 and 1994

Recent years with the current system (to 1,500 lbs when 75% of adjusted quota has been met):

- February 22, 2011
- January 27, 2012
- January 6, 2013
- January 17, 2014

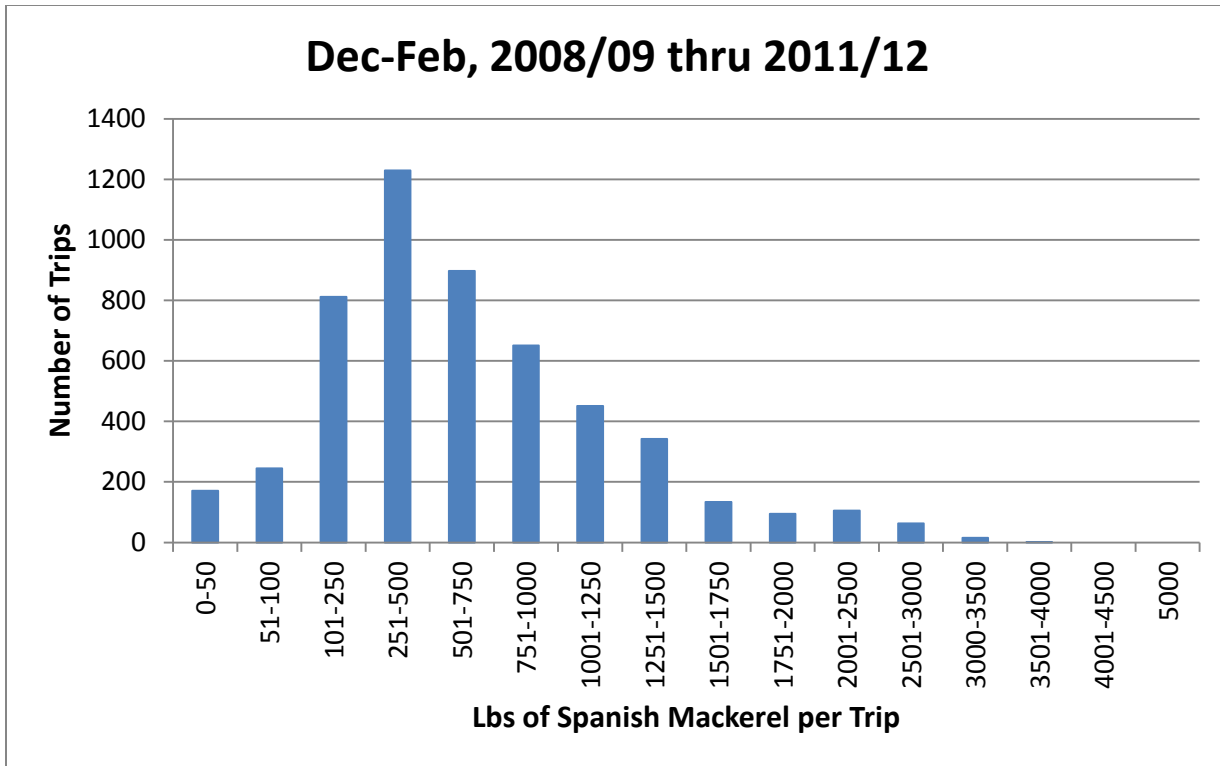


Figure 2. The number of trips with different lbs per trip for vessels landing Spanish mackerel caught with all gear types in Florida waters in the months of December, January, and February. All years are combined in those months during the fishing years of 2008-09 through 2011-2012. The data include catch from state waters and the EEZ. Data source: SEFSC logbook data.

Action 1: Modify the system of quota and trip limit adjustments for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in the Florida EEZ

Alternative 1 (No Action). Do not modify the current system of trip limits for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel.

	Florida EEZ
March 1- Nov 30	3,500 lbs
Dec 1- Feb 28(29)	No limit if 0-74% adjusted quota has been landed weekdays, 1,500 lbs weekends
	1,500 lbs if 75-99% adjusted quota has been landed
	500 lbs if 100% adjusted quota has been landed
	0 lbs if 100% quota has been landed

NOTE: For Alternatives 2-5, the South Atlantic Council will need to clarify that the proposed Southern Zone commercial quota (pending approval of Amendment 20B) will be used to trigger the step-downs, in-season AMs, and to calculate the adjusted quota *instead of the total Atlantic Spanish mackerel commercial ACL.*

Alternative 2. Establish a trip limit of 3,500 lbs for the Florida EEZ.

Alternative 3. Establish a trip limit of 3,500 lbs for the Florida EEZ. When 75% of [the proposed Southern Zone commercial quota] has been landed or projected to be landed, the trip limit would be reduced to 1,500 lbs.

Alternative 4. Establish a trip limit of 3,500 lbs for the Florida EEZ. When 75% of [the proposed Southern Zone commercial quota] has been landed or projected to be landed, the trip limit would be reduced to 500 lbs.

[AP recommendation] Alternative 5. Establish a trip limit of 3,500 lbs for the Florida EEZ. When 75% of [adjusted quota of the proposed Southern Zone quota] has been landed or projected to be landed, the trip limit would be reduced to 1,500 lbs. When 100% of [adjusted quota of the proposed Southern Zone quota] is reached, the trip limit is reduced to 500 lbs until the end of the fishing year or until [the proposed Southern Zone commercial quota] is met or projected to be met.

Table 1. Comparison of trip limits for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in Florida waters for each alternative under Action 1. SZQ= Proposed Southern Zone Quota

	Alt 1	Alt 2	Alt 3	Alt 4	Alt 5
March 1- Nov 30	3,500 lbs				
Dec 1- Feb 28	No limit if 0-74% adjusted quota has been landed weekdays, 1,500 lbs weekends	3,500 lbs	3,500 lbs with step-down to 1,500 lbs when 75% of SZQ is met	3,500 lbs with step-down to 500 lbs when 75% of SZQ is met	3,500 lbs with step-down to 1,500 lbs when 75% of adjusted SZQ is met; step-down to 500 lbs when 100% of adjusted SZQ is met.
	1,500 lbs if 75-99% adjusted quota has been landed				
	500 lbs if 100% adjusted quota has been landed				
	0 lbs if 100% ACL has been landed				

Table 2. Projected fishing days and closure dates for the 2014-2015 fishing season for each alternative under Action 1 under conditions that would exist if CMP Framework 1 and CMP Amendment 20B are implemented. The fishing year is March – February.

Alternative	Alternative 1	Alternative 2	Alternative 3	Alternative 4	Alternative 5
Projected Closure Date	n/a	02/21/15	02/28/15	n/a	n/a
Projected Fishing Days	365	357	364	365	365

Source: NMFS 2013

Table 4.1.1.2 in draft CMP Framework Amendment 2

Committee Actions:

- 1) Approve the language in the purpose and need.

Purpose for Actions

The purpose of this amendment is to modify the current trip limit system for commercial harvest of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in the Florida EEZ.

Need for Actions

The need for this amendment is to reduce complexity in the trip limit system while increasing social and economic benefits of the CMP fishery through sustainable and profitable harvest of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel.

- 2) Clarify if **the proposed Southern Zone quota** and associated adjusted quota based on the proposed Southern Zone quota will be the trigger for the trip limit system.

Proposed SZQ: 2,667,330 lbs

Adjusted Quota : 2,417,330 lbs

- 3) Clarify whether the trip limit system should still apply only to the Florida EEZ or to the entire Southern Zone (as proposed in 20B: SC,GA, FL).
- 4) Approve the language in the alternatives.
- 5) Add any additional alternatives, and remove any that are no longer under consideration.
- 6) Select a Preferred alternative.
- 7) Discuss public hearings schedule; approve for public hearings if necessary.
 - Public hearing at the September meeting, or on the road in August?