Summary of State and ASMFC Decisions Regarding Atlantic Cobia
South Atlantic Mackerel Committee
As of May 25, 2016

Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC)
April 18, 2016
The VMRC's Finfish Management Advisory Committee met and made the following recommendations for recreational harvest of Atlantic cobia in state waters *to go into effect after the closing date of the 2016 recreational season*:
- Recreational cobia harvest will be limited to one fish per person or three fish per vessel limit, whichever is lower.
-The minimum size limit will stay at 37 inches TL but with each vessel can only keep one fish over 50 inches TL.
Audio is available here: http://www.mrc.virginia.gov/FMAC/2016/FMAC-2016-04-18.mp3

April 26, 2016 (**PDF 4b** in the PDF portfolio)
The VMRC approved the following motion to notify the public that the VMRC is considering changes to regulations for the recreational cobia fishery in state waters:
THE COMMISSION MOVED TO ADVERTISE TO AMEND CHAPTER 4 VAC 20-510-10 ET SEQ., TO ESTABLISH AMENDMENTS TO THIS REGULATION, FOR THE 2016 VIRGINIA RECREATIONAL COBIA FISHERY, THAT INCLUDE BUT ARE NOT LIMITED TO INCREASES IN THE MINIMUM SIZE LIMIT; ESTABLISHMENT OF A VESSEL LIMIT; ESTABLISHMENT OF VARIABLE FISHING SEASONS; ESTABLISHMENT OF A PROHIBITION ON GAFFING COBIA; AND, ESTABLISHMENT OF A CLOSURE OF VIRGINIA WATERS TO RECREATIONAL COBIA HARVEST AND POSSESSION, ONCE FEDERAL WATERS ARE CLOSED TO RECREATIONAL HARVEST AND POSSESSION OF COBIA.
Audio is available here: http://www.mrc.virginia.gov/Commission_Audio/2016/04/2016-04-26-agenda.mp3

May 24, 2016
The Commission voted to adopt new regulations, which passed 5:4. The Commission voted to extend the recreational cobia fishing season to August 30, 2016, with a one fish per person limit and a two fish daily vessel limit. The minimum size is 40" total length with an allowance for one of the two fish to exceed 50" total length. There will also be a prohibition on gaffing. The Commission voted for a mandatory reporting system for recreational and charter boat cobia catch (harvest and released fish). The changes will be effective June 1, 2016.
The meeting summary and audio will be available soon on the VRMC website:
http://www.mrc.virginia.gov/calendar.shtm

North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission (NC MFC)
February 17-19, 2016 (**PDF 4c** in the PDF portfolio)
As reported at the March 2016 SAFMC meeting, the NC MFC approved a motion to immediately lower the bag limit for cobia in state waters to one fish, and to inquire with the SAFMC about the effect of a larger minimum size limit on extending the recreational fishing year. The changes went into effect on February 27, 2016.

Minutes are available here: http://portal.ncdenr.org/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=6a0247ff-d766-4f5a-985f-7b0245d0b983&groupId=38337
Audio is available here: http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/02-2016-mfc-audio
Meeting materials are available here: http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/02-2016-briefing-book

April 2016 (**PDF 4d** in the PDF portfolio)
The Southern Regional Advisory Committee, Northern Regional Advisory Committee and Finfish Advisory Committee each met separately and made the following recommendations to the NC FMC:

- Southern:
  - Advise MFC to complement federal June 20 season closure in state waters.
- Northern:
  - Recommend MFC maintain the current minimum size limit (33 inches) and one fish per person possession limit through June 20, 2016. After June 20, 2016 implement a two-fish per vessel possession limit, becoming out of compliance with federal regulations.
  - Recommend the MFC request NMFS to reconsider the biological boundary between the Gulf and Atlantic cobia stocks.
- Finfish:
  - Recommend MFC maintain the current minimum size limit (33 inches) and one-fish per person possession limit through June 20, 2016. After June 20, 2016, implement a two-fish per vessel possession limit, becoming out of compliance with federal regulations.
  - Recommend the MFC request NMFS to reconsider the biological boundary between the Gulf and Atlantic cobia stocks.
  - Request MFC come up with ways to collect additional recreational catch data on cobia with a tag system being one option.
  - Recommend MFC request commercial sector annual catch limit be reduced by same percentage as recreational sector annual catch limit.
  - Request MFC work with Michelle Duval to develop coast wide state-by-state allocations for cobia.

May 18-20, 2016 (**PDF 4e** in the PDF portfolio)
The NC MFC discussed cobia management and approved the following motions:
Adopt the following recreational cobia management measures for the May 23-Sept. 30, 2016 season: private boats will be allowed to fish Monday, Wednesday and Saturday only; all other recreational fishing modes will be allowed to fish 7 days a week; bag limits will be 4-fish-per vessel for charter boats; 2-fish per vessel for private boats; and 1-fish per person for shore based fishing (including pier and surf fishing). This does not impact catch-and-release fishing.

Include a 37-inch fork length minimum size limit on cobia to the previously adopted recreational cobia management measures at the May 19, 2016 commission meeting.

The proclamation was published on May 20, 2016, with the changes effective on May 23, 2016.

Audio and meeting materials available here: http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/mf/05-2016-briefing-book [note: audio may not be immediately available but will be posted soon.]

South Carolina (through SC Legislature with governor approval)
April 29, 2016 (**PDF 4f** in the PDF portfolio)
South Carolina implemented new legislation that will affect cobia in South Carolina state waters (out to 3 nautical miles offshore) south of Jeremy Inlet, Edisto Island:

- Possession of cobia in this area will be limited to one person per day and no more than three per boat per day, with a 33-inch fork length size limit. Previously, the bag limit for cobia in this area was two fish per day, with no boat limit.
- From May 1 to May 31, 2016, the cobia fishery in this area will be limited to catch and release only. It will be unlawful to take and possess cobia from this area during the month of May, and at any time federal regulations provide for the closure of recreational cobia fishing in federal waters.

Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC)
May 2, 2016 (**PDF 4g** in the PDF portfolio)
The Interstate Fisheries Management Program Policy Board discussed cobia management in May 2016. The Commission has committed to exploring options for the development of an interstate fishery management plan (FMP) for cobia. The Policy Board directed the South Atlantic Board to develop alternatives for developing an FMP that is either joint, complementary, or exclusively managed by the Commission in order to determine what type of FMP is the best way to move forward.
Minutes from the Policy Board meeting will be available in a few weeks. A recording (with audio and presentation screen) are available here: https://youtu.be/x5N02CdnPRQ.