

Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council
Mackerel Advisory Panel Report
Radisson Hotel, New Orleans, Louisiana
December 11-12, 2008

AP members in attendance

Mike Nugent, Chair
Bob Zales, II
Donald Waters
Edward Presley
Gene Proulx
George Niles
Myron Fischer
Tom Marvel, Jr.
Wiley Horton

AP members not in attendance

Ben Harvard
Chris Jenkins
Dan Dumont
Don Harper
Glenn Martin
Jim Twiggs
Leo Ledet, Jr.
Mike Holmes
Richard Rice
Edward Swindell

Bill Teehan - Council member

Carrie Simmons and Karen Hoak - Council staff

The Mackerel Advisory Panel (AP) convened 1:30 p.m. CDT jointly with the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC) for a presentation of stock assessment results on king mackerel. These results were presented by Mauricio Ortiz from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center (SEFSC). According to the final model, the Gulf king mackerel migratory stock was not overfished nor was overfishing occurring in 2006. After the presentation and questions, the Mackerel Panel convened separately starting at 2:30 pm. No **quorum** was reached due to inclement weather. Only 9 members were present. The meeting began with Panel member introductions and the agenda was approved as written with consent for other business to include discussions on the removal of old inactive permits and sector separation between the for-hire and private sector. The minutes of the last meeting, which was held by conference call in October 2004 were approved as written.

The AP discussed the analysis and findings of the Gulf of Mexico mackerel stock assessment. There were discussions and questions about the increased biomass of king mackerel in the western Gulf driving the stock abundance, without as much exploitation occurring in that region. There were also questions about the Gulf ground fish survey finding a peak in recruitment and then dropping back down again to lower recruitment (i.e., why wouldn't it be higher with more potential spawning biomass?).

Dr. Ortiz met with the Panel to answer the questions described above as well as questions about the expected yield million pounds (mp) with modified boundary lines, (i.e.,

Dade/Monroe, Council boundary, versus “status quo” with the mixing stock moving seasonally around the Peninsula for Florida).

The following motion was made because of the healthy stock assessment for king mackerel and the projected increase in the number of people to the Gulf coast fishing, as well as the decreased number of shrimp trawls catching juvenile fish (i.e., age-0 and age-1 king mackerel).

Motion: The AP recommends raising the TAC from 10 mp to 13 mp.

Motion passed 7 to 1

The following motion was made based on the previous motion for TAC and the fact that the recreational sector has not reached its TAC in several years. Others in the recreational sector felt that an additional fish in the bag limit would create pressure to catch three king mackerel for their customers.

Motion: The AP recommends increasing the recreational bag limit to three fish until the science dictates that it is no longer appropriate.

Motion passed 5 to 3

Next the AP discussed separating the jointly shared FMP for mackerel between the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (SAFMC) and the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (GMFMC). Several members of the AP involved in the Council process mentioned the difficulty of working with two Councils, especially with the new Annual Catch Limits (ACL) and Accountability Measures (AM) that will need to be implemented by 2011 for king mackerel.

Motion: AP recommends implementing separate FMPs for the SAFMC and the GMFMC for the king mackerel fishery.

Motion passed 6 to 2.

The AP members then discussed the boundary line between Gulf and Atlantic stock of king mackerel and the pluses and minuses that would occur for the industry by splitting the FMP between the SAFMC and GMFMC. These concerns included changes in stock assessments and ultimately potential changes in TAC. The following motion was made and then withdrawn later based on the previous motion to split the FMP between the Gulf of Mexico and South Atlantic Councils.

Motion: Maintain the status quo on boundaries (summer/winter)

Motion withdrawn

The following motion was used instead based on the Gulf jurisdiction and effort. Many members representing the commercial fishery felt the Council boundary would be undesirable due to the potential split between Councils of fishing areas around the Peninsula of Florida, particularly the Florida Keys.

Motion: The AP recommends establishing a boundary along the Monroe/Dade County line.

Motion passed 5 to 2 with one abstaining. (The abstaining member felt he did not have enough information to make a decision.)

The following morning the Mackerel AP reconvened at 8:30 am. The AP discussed individual fish quotas (IFQ) and some of the issues and problems that have occurred with the red snapper fishery, but that the Gulf Council and staff were trying to eliminate those problems in the grouper IFQ. One issue that the Mackerel AP did not want to occur was leasing IFQs, which often made stock brokers out of fishers. After discussion the mackerel AP made the following two motions:

Motion: The AP recommends that the Council initiate an Ad Hoc Commercial King Mackerel IFQ panel to investigate the feasibility of creating an IFQ program.

Motion passed unanimously.

Motion: The AP recommends the make-up of the Ad Hoc Commercial King Mackerel IFQ panel to be composed of representatives of all federally permitted commercial king mackerel fishermen, including but not limited to full-time, part-time, legal charterboat fish sellers, commercial king mackerel dealers, and gillnet fishers (active full-time). Representation should be proportional and reflect regional harvest.

Motion passed unanimously.

Next the Mackerel AP members discussed the last control date for the fishery and made the following motion:

Motion: The AP requests that the Council set a control date for the commercial king mackerel fishery of January 1, 2009 or as soon as legally possible after that date.

Motion passed unanimously

Several members were aware there were outstanding commercial permits that have never been used and without documented landings. Members felt that five years was a fair amount of time to exclude them if zero landings were recorded, so the Panel moved as follows:

Motion: The AP recommends that the Council consider removing inactive king mackerel commercial permits. Inactive equates to zero landings for all 5 prior years from the new proposed control date.

Motion passed unanimously

The AP members discussed trip limits and economic difficulties of trip limits, such as fuel costs when the fishery is healthy. One member explained that the 1,250-pound trip limit was originally scheduled to be reduced to 500 pounds when 75% of the hook-and-

line quota was caught so that the quota would not be overrun. After discussion the AP members moved as follows:

Motion: The AP recommends that the Council do away with the 500 lb. trip limit in the SW and NW zones that occurs when the quota reaches 75%, instead allowing the daily trip limit to remain at 1,250 lbs. until the quota is reached.

Motion passed unanimously with one absent (Mr. Fischer, who later reviewed the motion and had no objections).

Next the AP members discussed the economics of trip limits and the ability to fish further from shore with increased trip limits. With a healthy stock assessment and the increase in TAC, they felt the increase in trip limits was fair. Many members felt that trip limits penalized the capable fishers.

Motion: The AP recommends increasing the trip limit from 1,250 to 1,500 lbs. in both the NW and SW zones.

Motion passed unanimously.

The panel discussed the pluses and minuses of sector separation between the private and for-hire sector. After much discussion the AP considered status quo as the most appropriate and made the following motion:

Motion: The AP recommends that the private recreational sector not be split from the for-hire king mackerel fishery.

Motion passed 6 to 2.

The AP discussed the differences in state and federal permits when fisheries in federal waters are closed. The following motion was made but later withdrawn due to opposition by some of the members:

Motion: The Panel recommends that the federal charter/headboat coastal pelagic permit be limited to regulating federal fishing in the EEZ only.

Motion withdrawn.

The Mackerel AP adjourned at 10:50 am CDT.