PUBLIC HEARING SUMMARY

for

Coastal Migratory Pelagics (Mackerel) Framework Amendment 2

Commercial trip limits for Atlantic Spanish mackerel in the Southern Zone

This document is intended to serve as a SUMMARY for the actions and alternatives in Coastal Migratory Pelagics (Mackerel) Framework Amendment 2. It also provides background information and includes a summary of the expected biological, social, and economic effects from the proposed management measures.

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Comments are being accepted until 5 p.m., August 18, 2014

Why is the South Atlantic Council taking Action?

The South Atlantic Council is considering changes to the to reduce the complexity of the current commercial trip limit system for Atlantic group Spanish mackerel and to maintain trip limits to meet management goals for the fishery. Currently, the commercial trip limit for Atlantic Spanish mackerel north of the Georgia-Florida line is 3,500 lbs, year-round. In Florida waters, the trip limit is 3,500 lbs from March 1 through November 30. Starting on December 1, there is no trip limit on weekdays, and weekends have 1,500-lb trip limit. When 75% of the adjusted quota (250,000 lbs below the specified commercial ACL) is landed, the trip limit is 1,500 lbs every day. When 100% of the adjusted quota is landed, the trip limit is decreased to 500 lbs until the commercial ACL is met or expected to be met, when commercial harvest is closed through the accountability measure established in Amendment 18.

Fishery conditions and the regulations for Spanish mackerel have been through many changes since the system has been in place. When the quota and trip limit system was implemented, the adjusted quota 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. Additionally, when the South Atlantic Council implemented this system, the total allowable catch (TAC) for commercial harvest of Atlantic Spanish mackerel was 3.87 million pounds (mp). The current commercial ACL, set in Amendment 18, is 3.13 mp, and the South Atlantic Council has proposed a commercial ACL of 3.33 mp in Framework Amendment 1 (under Sercretarial review). Both the current and proposed commercial ACLs are lower than the TAC that was in place when the trip limit system was implemented. Additionally, the lack of a Spanish mackerel trip limit in Florida waters on weekdays beginning December 1 may contribute to early closures in the spring under the 3.13 mp ACL.

Lastly, Amendment 20B proposes to establish a Northern Zone and a Southern Zone at the North Carolina/South Carolina boundary, with separate commercial quotas for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel. To reduce complexity within the proposed Southern Zone by having consistent trip limits across the entire zone, the South Atlantic Council is considering changes to the trip limit system that will apply to South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

NOTE: The terms “Southern Zone” and “Southern Zone quota” reference the proposed area and associated commercial quota that would be specified by Amendment 20B, which is not yet fully implemented through rule making. Henceforth, the terms “Southern Zone” and “Southern Zone quota” should be considered a *proposed* fishery management area within which this action will take place, and its associated commercial quota.

Purpose for Action

The ***purpose*** of this amendment is to modify the current trip limit system for commercial harvest of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in the proposed Southern Zone.

Need for Action

The ***need*** for this amendment is to tailor the trip limit system for the proposed Southern Zone to current conditions in the fishery and the new catch limits, while increasing social and economic benefits of the CMP fishery through sustainable and profitable harvest of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel.

What is the Proposed Action?

There is one proposed in this amendment. The action has a range of alternatives, including a 'no action alternative'. After public hearings, the South Atlantic Council will select a 'preferred alternative'.

Action: Modify the system of quota and trip limit adjustments for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in the Southern Zone

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

Alternative 2. Establish a trip limit of 3,500 lbs for the Southern Zone for March 1- November 30. After December 1, when 75% of the adjusted Southern Zone quota has been landed or projected to be landed, the trip limit would be reduced to 1,500 lbs.

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

Alternative 4. Establish a trip limit of 3,500 lbs for the Southern Zone. When 75% of adjusted quota of the 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 Southern Zone quota is reached, the trip limit is reduced to 500 lbs until the end of the fishing year or until the Southern Zone commercial quota is met or projected to be met.

Which species and areas would be affected by the actions?

The proposed action in this amendment would affect commercial harvest of Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in federal waters in the South Atlantic, primarily in the proposed Southern Zone (Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina).

Although the two migratory groups of Spanish mackerel mix in south Florida, abundance trends along each coast of Florida are different, indicating sufficient isolation between the two migratory groups to warrant separate management regimes. Consequently, the boundary for Spanish mackerel is fixed at the Miami-Dade/Monroe County border on Florida's southeast coast. Amendment 20B proposes a Northern Zone and a Southern Zone (as shown in **Figure S-1**) that will have separate commercial quotas for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel.

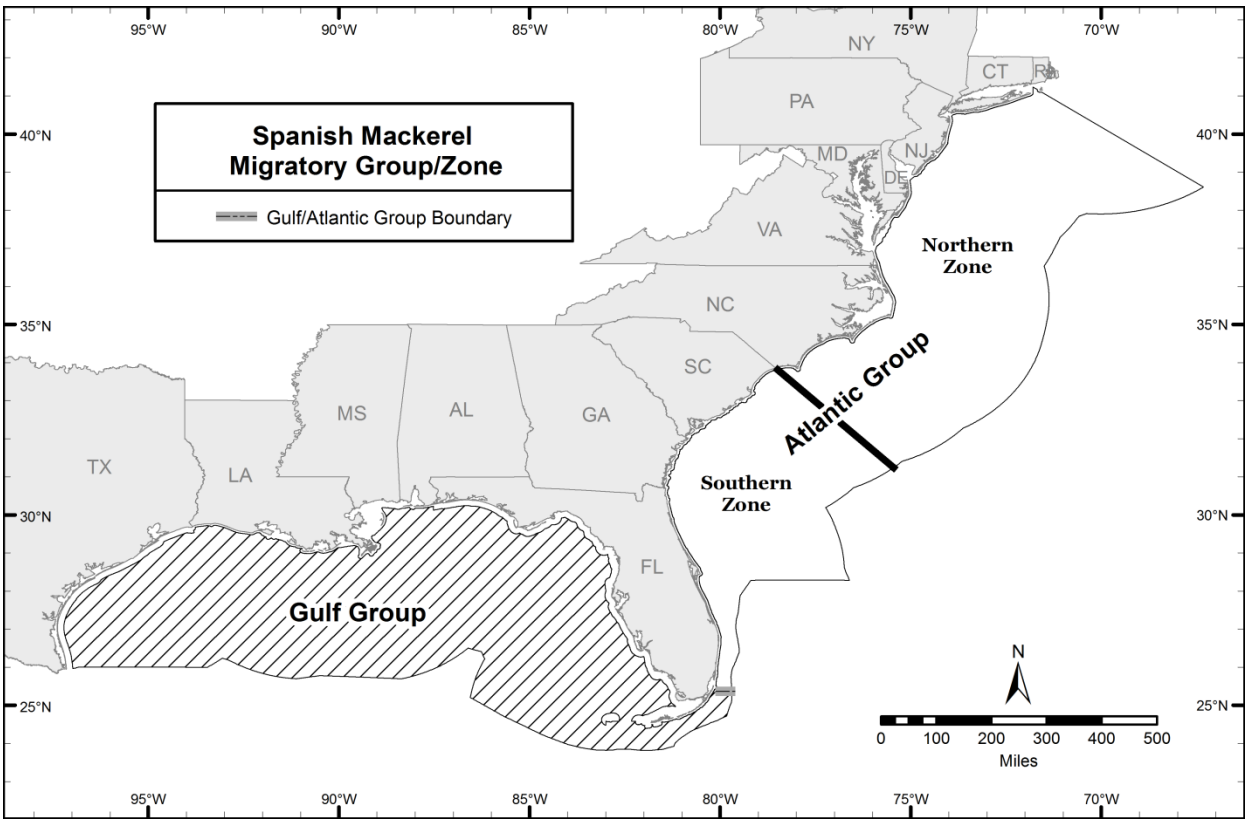

Figure S-1. Fixed boundary between Atlantic and Gulf migratory groups of Spanish mackerel, with the proposed Northern and Southern Zones in the Atlantic Group (pending approval of CMP Amendment 20B).

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What Are the Alternatives?

Action: Modify the system of quota and trip limit adjustments for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel in the Southern Zone

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Alternative 2. Establish a trip limit of 3,500 lbs for the Southern Zone for March 1- November 30. After December 1, when 75% of the adjusted Southern Zone quota has been landed or projected to be landed, the trip limit would be reduced to 1,500 lbs.

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

Alternative 4. Establish a trip limit of 3,500 lbs for the Southern Zone. When 75% of adjusted quota of the 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 Southern Zone quota is reached, the trip limit is reduced to 500 lbs until the end of the fishing year or until the Southern Zone commercial quota is met or projected to be met.

Table S-1. Comparison of trip limits for Atlantic group Spanish mackerel in the Southern Zone for each alternative for South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida. The alternatives would not change the year-round 3,500-lb trip limit for the area north of the South Carolina/North Carolina boundary.
SZQ= Southern Zone Quota

	Alt 1- FL	**Alt 1- SC/GA**	**Alt 2- SC/GA/FL**	**Alt 3- SC/GA/FL**	**Alt 4- SC/GA/FL**
March 1- Nov 30	**3,500** lbs	**3,500 lbs**	**3,500** lbs	**3,500** lbs with step-down to **500** lb when 75% of SZQ is met	**3,500** lbs with step-down to **1,500** lb when 75% of adjusted SZQ is met; step-down to **500** lbs when 100% of adjusted SZQ is met.
Dec 1- Feb 28	**Unlimited** on weekdays and **1,500** lbs on weekends. When 75% of the adjusted quota is met, set at 1,500 lbs every day. When 100% of the adjusted quota is met, reduced to **500** lbs.		When 75% of the adjusted SZQ is met, reduced to **1,500** lbs.		

Summary of Effects

Biological Effects

Alternative 1 (No Action) would result in a 337-day fishing season in the Florida EEZ (**Table 2.3**), compared to a slightly shorter fishing seasons under **Alternatives 2** and **4**, and a slightly longer fishing season length under **Alternative 3**. However, the projected season lengths for each of the alternatives are all very similar and differ by only as much as several days and as few as one day. If the ACL is projected to be met, commercial harvest of Spanish mackerel is closed for the duration of the fishing season, which prevents overfishing from occurring. Therefore, the biological impacts of **Alternative 1 (No Action)** are expected to be neutral. **Alternative 2** could result in the shortest fishing season of all the alternatives under consideration. As mentioned previously, Amendment 20B, if implemented, would allow proposed northern and southern zone quota to be transferred from one zone to another. The influence quota transfers may have on the intended effects of modifications to the Spanish mackerel trip limit are unknown. However, slowing the rate of harvest triggered once the 75% threshold level is met may be biologically beneficial if it allows fishery managers to more accurately predict when the proposed Southern Zone quota would be met.

Table S-2. Projected fishing days and closure dates for Spanish mackerel in the southern zone for the 2014-2015 fishing season for each alternative 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
Projected Closure Date	2/1/15	1/24/15	2/18/15	1/31/15
Projected Fishing Days	337	329	354	336

Source: NMFS 2013

Alternative 3 would also remove the period of unlimited trips beginning on December 1 each year. This alternative would keep the current trip limit of 3,500 lb for the proposed Southern Zone, but would reduce the trip limit to 500 lb when 75% of the quota is harvested. A slower rate of harvest triggered by meeting the 75% threshold level may be biologically beneficial if it allows fishery managers to more accurately predict when the ACL or proposed southern zone quota would be met. **Alternative 4** is most similar to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** since it would retain the adjusted commercial quota for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel fishery, and would specify two trip limit reductions for the east Florida EEZ.

The overall biological effects of **Alternatives 1 (No Action)-4** are expected to be neutral because under all circumstances, harvest is limited to the commercial ACL (zone quotas, if Amendment 20B is implemented), if necessary.

Economic Effects

If data from the 2012/2013 fishing year are excluded from the analysis, closures would be expected for the proposed Southern Zone under all of the alternatives considered, with the longest season expected to occur under **Alternative 3** (354-day season), followed by **Alternative 1 (No Action)** (337-day season), Alternative 4 (336-day season), and Alternative 2 (329-day season). As previously discussed, because longer seasons are generally expected to result in more economic benefits than short seasons (assuming the equivalent harvest occurs), **Alternative 3** would be expected to result in the highest economic benefits, followed by

Alternative 1 (No Action), **Alternative 4**, and **Alternative 2**. The rankings are (best to worst): **Alternative 3**-**Alternative 1 (No Action)**-**Alternative 4**-**Alternative 2**.

Social Effects

Overall, the social effects would be associated with economic costs and benefits for the commercial vessels who harvest Spanish mackerel in the Florida EEZ, changes in fishing opportunities for vessels fishing in the Florida EEZ due to trip limit changes, and a reduced level of complexity from the current trip limit system for the Florida EEZ. Social effects associated with positive or negative biological effects that could affect the Spanish mackerel resource are expected to be minimal. Even if effort increased in the Florida EEZ, it is expected that the trip limit system under any of the alternatives would not contribute to a substantially longer season than any other alternative. As a result, the effects on fishermen and communities would be expected to be similar under all of all alternatives.

Changes in fishing opportunities and trip efficiency could be affected by different trip limit systems. However, some fish houses may set a 'fish house limit' for vessels that the fish house regularly buys from, which could be lower than the allowable trip limit. The period that allows unlimited trips in **Alternative 1 (No Action)** would be removed under **Alternatives 2-4**, and this could affect some vessels taking advantage of maximized trip efficiency and profitability.

There is a trade-off between flexibility and a trip limit system tailored to current fishery conditions, and complexity of the system. Reducing complexity would be expected to be beneficial for compliance and enforcement. The step-downs in **Alternatives 2-4** could provide flexibility by helping to slow the rate of harvest later in the season while still allowing Spanish mackerel fishing. The use of the adjusted Southern Zone quota as a trigger for the step-down in **Alternatives 2** and **4** do maintain a similar level of complexity as under **Alternative 1 (No Action)**, but could help to allow fishing to continue but keep an additional buffer to minimize the risk of exceeding the commercial ACL for Atlantic Spanish mackerel. **Alternative 3** is the least complex trip limit system.

Administrative Effects

Alternatives 3 represents a decreased administrative burden compared to **Alternative 1 (No Action)** because it removes the adjusted quota. The burden on law enforcement would not change under **Alternatives 1 (No Action), 2, 3** or **4**, since commercial quota closures implemented when the commercial ACLs or adjusted quota are projected to be met are currently enforced.

The administrative impacts under **Alternative 1 (No Action**) would be the most complex and the least beneficial, followed by **Alternative 4, Alternative 3,** and **Alternative 2**. **Alternatives 2** and **3** represent the least complex and the most beneficial alternatives due to reducing the complexity of the quota and trip limit regulations.

Public Hearing Dates and Locations

South Atlantic public hearings will be held from 4 - 7 p.m. in the following locations:

August 6, 2014 Bay Watch Resort & Conference Center 2701 S. Ocean Boulevard N. Myrtle Beach, SC 29582 Phone: 252-240-1155	**August 7, 2014** Crystal Coast Civic Center 3505 Arendell Street Morehead City, NC 28557 Phone: 252-247-3883
August 11, 2014 Key West Marriott Beachside 3841 North Roosevelt Boulevard Key West, FL 33040 Phone: 305-296-8100	**August 12, 2014** Doubletree by Hilton Oceanfront 2080 North Atlantic Ave. Cocoa Beach, FL 32931 Phone: 321-783-9222
August 13, 2014 Wyndham Jacksonville Riverwalk 1515 Prudential Drive Jacksonville, FL 32207 Phone: 904-396-5100	**August 14, 2014** Mighty Eighth Air Force Museum 175 Bourne Avenue Pooler, GA 31322 Phone: 912-743-8888

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All comments must be received by 5 p.m. on August 18, 2014

What are the Next Steps?

South Atlantic Council approves for public hearings
June 2014

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South Atlantic Council holds public hearings
August 2014

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South Atlantic Council reviews public input, selects a preferred alternative, and takes final action
September 2014

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Gulf Atlantic Council reviews and takes final action
October 2014

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Framework Amendment 2 is submitted to the Secretary of Commerce for approval and implementation
November 2014