



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel Report – June 2025 Meeting





Mackerel Port Meetings Feedback

The port meetings were well received by members of the fishing community. These types of meetings should continue to be used to get mackerel fishermen engaged in the management process.

- Introductory presentations should continue to briefly go over the management structure and note the difference between these types of meetings and formal public comment.
- Breakout groups were a great way to encourage discussion.
- Visiting communities that are not regularly visited in-person illustrated that Council members and staff were invested in the needs of those communities





SEDAR 78: Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Update

There were significant concerns about the MRIP data that went into the stock assessment. Results from the MRIP FES pilot study should be available soon and the AP feels that the Council should wait for those results.

Environmental changes are affecting the distribution Atlantic Spanish mackerel, and the stock assessment process needs to incorporate data from up north, especially the NEMAP survey

Implementing catch level recommendations, based on SEDAR 78, could have serious consequences for the Atlantic Spanish mackerel fishery, which is a critical fishery for commercial and recreational fishermen.





SEDAR 78: Atlantic Spanish Mackerel Update



MOTION 1: RECOMMEND THE COUNCIL REQUEST AN UPDATE OF THE ATLANTIC SPANISH MACKEREL OFL AND ABC RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE RESULTS OF THE FES PILOT STUDY BEFORE IMPLEMENTING ANY NEW CATCH LEVELS.

**APPROVED BY ADVISORY PANEL
(UNANIMOUS)**

Management Measures from Port Meetings Feedback

There was support for considering all the management discussed, with the following notes:

- Do not look at **sector allocations** until recreational estimates have been improved.
- Look at modifying the commercial Spanish mackerel **fishing year**.
- Consider **step-downs** for the commercial Spanish mackerel trip limit in the Northern Zone.
- Consider a **vessel limit** for recreational harvest of Spanish mackerel.
- Consider implementing **regional zones** for recreational Spanish mackerel.
- Consider modifications to the king mackerel recreational **bag limit**.
- Consider implementing “**best practices**” regulations for king mackerel tournaments .
- Discuss **live baiting** in the recreational fishery.



Giant Manta Ray Interactions with the Cobia Fishery



In North Carolina fishermen rarely see giant manta rays, however they do sight cast for cobia by seeking out other ray species, such as cownose rays.

In Florida, targeting cobia by following manta rays occurs in state waters, so AP members felt that it was not an issue for federal regulators to discuss. The practice only happens for a brief amount of time each year, usually two to three weeks or less.

It was suggested that braid or leader restriction may help to remedy any negative effects experienced by the giant manta rays; however, AP members also felt the giant manta rays were large enough that it was unlikely any hook or line interactions were having a substantial negative effect on the animals.

Improvements to For-Hire Reporting

*Discussed
earlier in the
agenda.*





Citizen Science

Recommendation to give out an item at events, tackle shops, etc. that is of known measure that fishermen can put into pictures for SAFMC Release.

Many individuals, fishermen included, are competition driven. SAFMC Release could capitalize on this by adding a leaderboard into the application.

The Citizen Science Program could work with fishing clubs to see about getting data from their monthly or end-of-year competitions.

Citizen Science data is critical to the fishing science and management process and the Council should illustrate its importance to those how make funding decisions to ensure the program continues to have the financial support necessary to be successful.

Research and Monitoring Plan

*Discussed earlier
in the agenda.*





Lines of Communication

Conversations with the Council



Building trust is going to be an important part of *Lines* and in combating the perception that Council members don't care about fishermen.

Recommendation to use social media and fishing clubs as advertising platforms for these meetings.

Include a suggestion box at meetings or locations fishermen frequent.

Hosting these meetings in a neutral environment will be important to getting attendees from all sectors and components.

All *Lines of Communication* attendees should be signed up to receive the *South Atlantic Bite* newsletter.



Sticky Wall Session Feedback

Some AP members felt it might be helpful to have pre-identified categories that would encourage discussion and keep attendees on topic. Other AP members felt that it was nice not having categories already identified because what is important to attendees is likely to change between communities.

Some AP members liked having staff write down comments to place on the sticky wall, others felt they would've liked some time to brainstorm and be provided with their own cards to place on the sticky wall.

- It was suggested that an agenda could be posted both online and in the meeting room so that those that plan to attend can brainstorm in advance.

Having prompting questions that encourage discussion which can snowball is fantastic, some suggest questions included:

- What did you come to the meeting to talk about with Council members?
- What was going better with your fishery five years ago?

Topical Session Feedback

Need to better explain why the Council wants this information. The questions surrounding trip satisfaction were a little too broad and it will be important to make sure conversation doesn't devolve and Council members get the input they need.

It's important to make sure questions apply to all sectors. Example: for commercial and for-hire fishermen, satisfaction is considered over the course of a season not a single trip, whereas for private recreational fishermen, satisfaction per trip is fine.

Recommendation to use colored dots to split people up into breakout groups for this session to ensure a mix of individuals in each group.

It is better to have the person taking notes on the flip chart standing at the front of the room (as opposed to at the table).

Consider using technology that would allow groups to brainstorm together and have it immediately visualized on a screen.

Informal Session Feedback

Consider doing this session first to break the ice and get attendees thinking before moving into the sticky wall and topical discussion.

Alternatively, could add an informal session before the meeting starts (i.e. a meet-and-greet prior to the actual meeting).

- A meet-and-greet might help attendees feel more comfortable in the meeting room.
- If this was separate from the main event, it is unlikely fishermen will leave because they now have thoughts and ideas that they want to discuss.

Consider using categories developed during the stick wall session for topics during this informal session.

- It will be important to keep the tables discussing the management process and citizen science, but releases could be a revolving topic.



Credit: Salt Water Sportsman

Other Business: Conservation and Management of Atlantic Bonito



Atlantic bonito (*Sarda sarda*) have become a popular fish to target, especially in the springtime. Currently there are no regulations related to recreational or commercial harvest. AP members would like to discuss the ten criteria for conservation and management outlined in the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

- Some AP members felt that it is important to get a head start on considering management needs for a fishery that is getting bigger with social media.
- Other AP members expressed concern about the lack of science showing that there is a need for management and a concern about the capacity to conduct proper science and management for this species given the current lack of resources.



Questions?