**Summary of the Public Hearings on**

**Coastal Migratory Pelagics Amendment 29**

**Tampa, Florida**

**December 1, 2016**

**Council/Staff:**

Dr. Tom Frazer – Council Member

Ryan Rindone – Council Staff

Emily Muehlstein – Council Staff

2 Members of the public attended

1 Member of the public commented

**Gary Jennings –** Recreational – American Sportfishing Association (ASA)

Mr. Jennings thinks that the fishing sectors both pursue king mackerel very differently. Commercial fishermen are focused on harvesting all they can, while recreational fishermen fish more based on the probability of encountering a particular species of fish. Currently, it seems that the allocation sharing method is a “one-way street”, whereby the only sector which would benefit from the system is the commercial sector. A more thorough economic analysis than the one provided in the document is necessary before considering any allocation change at all. Further, Alternative 3 should be explored further compared to Action 1- having the SSC involved would provide an additional level of assurance to recreational fishermen that a better decision might be made. The ASA is opposed to Action 1. With respect to Action 2, the ASA is disappointed that the Council has not taken the advice of the ASA and provided an alternative which holds the recreational sector entirely blameless for exceeding the ACL. As such, the ASA is also opposed to Action 2.

**Key West, Florida**

**December 1, 2016**

**Council/Staff:**

John Sanchez – Council Member

Ryan Rindone – Council Staff

16 Members of the public attended

9 Members of the public commented

**Brian Bennett** – Commercial Fisherman – Key West, FL

Mr. Bennett fishes for king mackerel, and makes fishing trips just for kings. He favor the Council’s current preferred alternatives for CMP 29 (Alternative 2, Options 2b and 2e in Action 1; Alternative 3 in Action 2). He usually doesn’t get to fish beyond February or March, but maybe he could with a higher quota.

The price right now is about $2.50 a pound, meaning that Mr. Bennett can clear close to $3,000 with the 1,250 pound trip limit. A lot of people want higher trip limits, but the price will drop if folks start landing more fish all at once.

**George Niles** – Commercial Fisherman – Key West, FL

The king mackerel stock is healthy and rebuilt, and the Magnuson Act says that the fish should be caught. There has been a surplus in the fishery for years, and this is the perfect fishery to try this new allocation sharing idea. Other potential candidates are red grouper in the Gulf, and yellowtail snapper and mahi in the Atlantic. Mr. Niles favors the Council’s current preferred alternatives in Action 1 (Alternative 2, Options 2b and 2e). For Action 2, he thinks if the recreational fishermen exceed their quota, they should be held accountable, just like the gillnetters are in the commercial sector. The net fleet has a payback provision. Mr. Niles thinks the bag limit should be reduced in Action 2, rather than closing the season.  
  
With respect to the trip limit, king mackerel is among the oldest fisheries in the country. It simply costs too much to go fish for kingfish with hook and line right now- fishermen have to go too far to make no money. Most fishermen who want the 1,250 pound trip limit are not full-time commercial fishermen. Mr. Niles is a full-time fisherman, and needs those fish. All of the handline fish go into the same market, and a higher trip limit will help guys to profitably fish for kingfish.

**Billy Carter** – Commercial Fisherman – Key West, FL

Mr. Carter says we all need to share the fish. If the recreational guys aren’t catching them, then the commercial fishermen should be able to. The Mexicans aren’t regulated like Gulf commercial fishermen in the US, and US fishermen compete with Mexican fishermen in the markets to sell kingfish. Mr. Carter fishes for many different species- not just kingfish- to stay profitable. Mr. Carter favors the Council’s current preferred alternatives for CMP 29 (Alternative 2, Options 2b and 2e in Action 1; Alternative 3 in Action 2).

**Bill Kelly** – Florida Keys Commercial Fisherman’s Association – Key West, FL

The big issue here is allocation. There are large inequities in the current allocation for king mackerel. The Councils are directed to manage fisheries at OY, and fishermen are fishing well below that right now. The SSC tells the Council that underfishing can be just as bad as overfishing. Commercial fishermen don’t want to see these reducing quotas. Fishermen have essentially been under a 30 year rebuilding plan, and king mackerel are still underused. Management needs to be more flexible, and fishermen are not catching what they should be.

The FKCFA favors the Council’s current preferred alternatives for CMP 29 (Alternative 2, Options 2b and 2e in Action 1; Alternative 3 in Action 2). The FKCFA truly needs hard allocation changes though, rather than the shifting allocations proposed. The data support changing the allocations- the Council just needs to make the change.

On the trip limit issue, the FKCFA requested an increase to 2,000 pounds for the handliners. Fuel and time costs make the current trip limit not profitable. Increasing the trip limit won’t necessarily affect the price. Both Councils were on board with raising the limit, and at the final hearing, they suddenly changed their mind.

Lastly, the FKCFA wants to see fishermen with gillnet permits be able to purchase and fish handline permits for king mackerel also. It isn’t fair to these multi-fishery participants to prevent them from catching fish.

**Daniel Padron** – Commercial Fisherman – Key West, FL

The current king mackerel allocations are from 1993, and are antiquated. The recreational sector is only catching about 40% of their quota, and changes to those allocations should have been looked at long ago. Ten percent is a good start, but commercial fishermen need hard changes to the allocations. More allocation needs to be shifted to the commercial sector. Bear and deer are managed by abundance- king mackerel are very abundant, and many more can be caught than are currently allowed. Mr. Padron favors the Council’s current preferred alternatives in Action 1 (Alternative 2, Options 2b and 2e).

**Josh Nicholas** – Commercial Fisherman – Key West, FL

Mr. Nicholas favors the Council’s current preferred alternatives for Action 1 (Alternative 2, Options 2b and 2e), but am not opposed to sharing more with the commercial sector.

On the trip limit, Mr. Nicholas says maybe only 5% of the fishermen who catch king mackerel only fish for king mackerel. Everyone else fishes for multiple species. Increasing the trip limit to 2,000 pounds wouldn’t hurt anyone.

**Billy Niles** – Commercial Fisherman – Key West, FL

Mr. Niles has been fishing for 60+ years. The price of fish drops when the fish get to the Keys. Puerto Rico used to buy lots of fish from the Keys. Research the history of king mackerel fishing and one will see that the Keys were where the fishery was focused. Mr. Niles favors the Council’s current preferred alternatives for Action 1 (Alternative 2, Options 2b and 2e).

**Bobby Pillar** – Commercial Fisherman – Key West, FL

Mr. Pillar would rather see a hard allocation change than any allocation sharing. He likes the idea of allocation sharing, but a hard allocation change helps businessmen know what to expect from fishing. He hasn’t landed real numbers of king mackerel in ages because it hasn’t been profitable for him to do so. What happens if he doesn’t have the landings to keep his permits? What if other fisheries are hurting and he has to go fish for king mackerel longer to make ends meet? Mr. Pillar doesn’t want to lose my permit because he hasn’t been able to afford to make the trips for king mackerel.

**Robert Palma** – Commercial Fisherman – Key West, FL

Mr. Palma favors the Council’s current preferred alternatives for Action 1 (Alternative 2, Options 2b and 2e).

**Pascagoula, Mississippi**

**December 5, 2016**

**Council/Staff:**

Leann Bosarge – Council Member

Ryan Rindone – Council Staff

Camilla Shireman – Council Staff

1 Member of the public attended

1 Member of the public commented

**FJ Eicke** – Private Recreational Fisherman – Coastal Conservation Association

Mr. Eicke is opposed to any kind of allocation sharing or reallocation at this time. He remembers discussion of possibly shifting red grouper allocation to the recreational sector, and he was opposed to that as well. Allocation has been a popular topic in fisheries management throughout time, and many journalists and organizations have provided input on this topic. He thinks that reallocating in king mackerel may be premature. The proposed allocation sharing method appears to have many moving parts. Mr. Eicke says that greater amberjack is one species which has had allocation shifted from the recreational to the commercial sector, and a few years ago, it resulted in the first early recreational closure. King mackerel are not fished for in the same manner as reef fish, in that the larger animals are the ones kept while the rest are released. Formal fisheries allocation policies need to be considered prior to any allocation sharing. Mr. Eicke is opposed to both Action 1 and Action 2.

Mr. Eicke noted that the Council is considering CMP 29 based on harvesting king mackerel at optimum yield. He says that leaving additional fish in the water beyond what the stock assessment suggests is acceptable is not necessarily a bad thing. He thinks fisheries managers are dealing with many unknowns with respect to managing king mackerel, and should proceed cautiously. He does not think that the Councils are necessarily managing sector allocations in the most appropriate way.

**Mobile, Alabama**

**December 6, 2016**

**Council/Staff:**

Kevin Anson – Council Member

Ryan Rindone – Council Staff

Camilla Shireman – Council Staff

0 Members of the public attended

**Panama City, Florida**

**December 7, 2016**

**Council/Staff:**

Dr. Pam Dana – Council Member

Ryan Rindone – Council Staff

Camilla Shireman – Council Staff

3 Members of the public attended

2 Members of the public commented

**Walter Akins** – Charter and Commercial Fisherman – Panama City

Mr. Akins is a historical captain, and thinks that the historical captains should be allocated a specific allotment. Those historical captains were not allowed to get a permit originally, and don’t want to pay a lot of money to get a permit now. Those captains should be individually allocated king mackerel to land when they can.

Mr. Akins went fishing recently, and had to fight against the mahi to catch fish while bottom fishing. He thinks that the snapper limit for charter trips should be allowed to land three fish per person, regardless of size.

**Warner Foster** – Private Recreational Fisherman

Mr. Foster prefers no action (Alternative 1 in Action 1). He thinks that king mackerel are still rebuilding and need more time. He also thinks that once allocation is taken away from the recreational sector that they will never get it back.

Mr. Foster says that he has never been checked by fisheries law enforcement or biologists to see what he is catching. He thinks there should be some way for him to tell someone what he is catching.