



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel Meeting Summary Report June 2025



Overview of the AP Meeting



- **Met in Charleston, SC from April 22-23, 2025.**
 - AP last met November 2023.
- **Covered the following topics:**
 - Received updates on the SAFMC Citizen Science Program, Council amendment development, Dolphin Wahoo management efforts, and the management strategy evaluation for dolphin.
 - Provided feedback on **Regulatory Amendment 3, limiting entry into the for-hire Dolphin Wahoo fishery, the research and monitoring plan, the For-hire Reporting Improvements Amendment, and Lines of Communication.**
 - **Spearfishing concerns and a minimum size limit for wahoo as well as measures for the commercial dolphin fishery** discussed under Other Business.

Regulatory Amendment 3



General comments

- Noted several recent peer reviewed studies stating a decline in the dolphin stock on the U.S. Atlantic Coast.
 - [Damiano et al \(2024\)](#), [Rudershausen et al \(2024\)](#), and [Runde et al \(2025\)](#).
- Overall, consider higher retention limits onboard charter vessels or leave limits “as is.”
 - Private vessels could have lower retention limits.

Draft Action 1 (Modifying the applicable geographic range of the minimum size limit)

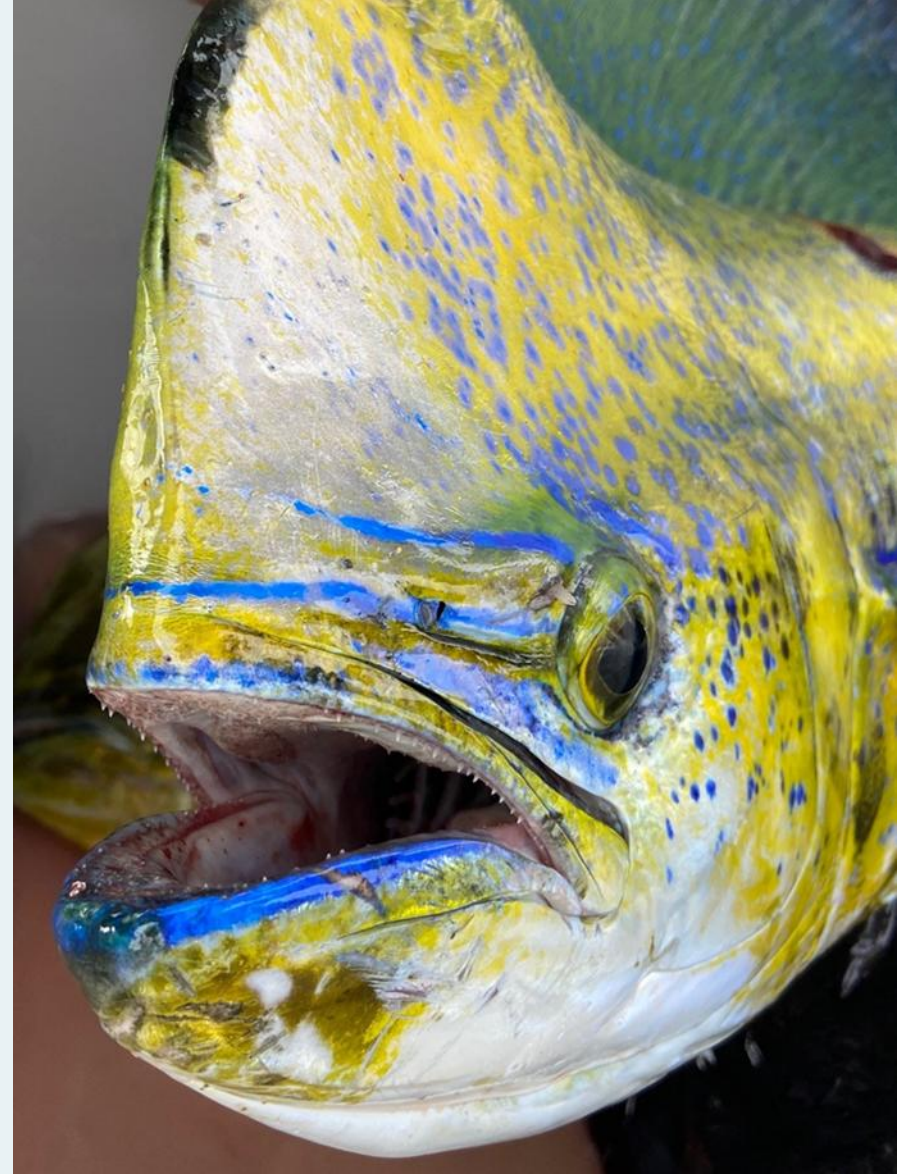
- Some AP members felt that there is a high release mortality associated with dolphin.
- Worry about a slightly undersized fish accidentally being kept when “bailing” dolphin.
- Other AP members noted that they would like to see the 20” minimum size limit extended throughout the management range.

Regulatory Amendment 3



SUPPORT AMENDMENT 3 AS FOLLOWS: DRAFT ACTION 1, ALTERNATIVE 4, WHICH IS A 20" FORK LENGTH FROM FLORIDA THROUGH MAINE, WITH THE FOLLOWING CHANGES OF ALLOWING 1 FISH LESS THAN 20" BUT NOT LESS THAN 18" FORK LENGTH PER VESSEL FOR RECREATIONAL FISHERMEN, AND 3 FISH LESS THAN 20" BUT NOT LESS THAN 18" FORK LENGTH PER VESSEL FOR CHARTER VESSELS. INTENDED TO BE PART OF A VESSEL AGGREGATE.

APPROVED BY THE AP (UNANIMOUS)



Regulatory Amendment 3



DRAFT Action 2. Modify the daily recreational bag limit for dolphin

- Smaller bag limits can create a challenge for marketing trips onboard some charter vessels.
 - Particularly in North Carolina.
- Lower limits could be considered onboard private vessels.
 - If the limit is too low, anglers will do something other than go fishing offshore (fish inshore, play golf, etc.).
- There was *not* a consensus among the AP on whether the bag limit should be reduced. Some members were in favor of reducing the bag limit for dolphin, while others were not.

Regulatory Amendment 3



DRAFT Action 3. Modify the recreational vessel limit for dolphin

- One of the goals of the FMP is to reduce conflict between users of the resource. A lower vessel limit would reduce conflict and competition.
- Private vessels could have a lower limit than charter vessels.
 - Charter vessels need higher limits to market trips to some clients.

DRAFT Action 4. Modify captain and crew recreational daily bag limits for dolphin onboard charter vessels

- The AP reiterated support for maintaining captain and crew bag limits (**Alternative 1 (No Action)**).
 - These limits are important on charter trips, particularly those with a low number of anglers.

Regulatory Amendment 3

SUPPORT AMENDMENT 3 AS FOLLOWS: DRAFT ACTION 3 & 4 VESSEL LIMIT IS 30 FISH FOR PRIVATE VESSELS, AND 36 FISH FOR CHARTER VESSELS, AND CAPTAIN AND CREW MAY RETAIN RECREATIONAL DAILY BAG LIMITS FOR DOLPHIN ONBOARD CHARTER VESSELS FOR A TOTAL OF 48 FISH. APPROVED BY THE AP (UNANIMOUS)

Note: At the time that this motion was discussed, a 5 fish bag limit on private vessels was being considered along with a 6 fish bag limit on charter vessels. Hence the inclusion of 36 and 48 fish. The motion for these reduced bag limits did not pass.



Limiting entry into the for-hire Dolphin Wahoo fishery



- Many expressed concern and were not in favor of considering limited entry for the Dolphin Wahoo fishery.
 - Apprehensive about the cost of the permit becoming too expensive.
 - If limited entry is further considered, need to make sure that new participants can enter the fishery.
 - If the goal is to professionalize the fishery, look into requirements that other professions have implemented such as continuing education credits.



Limiting entry into the for-hire Dolphin Wahoo fishery

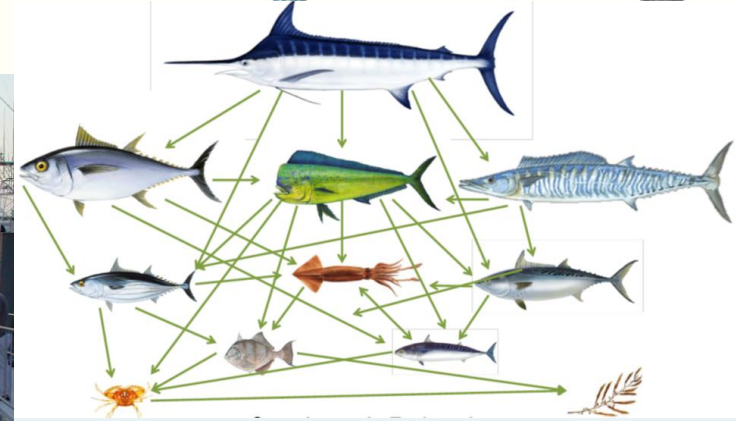
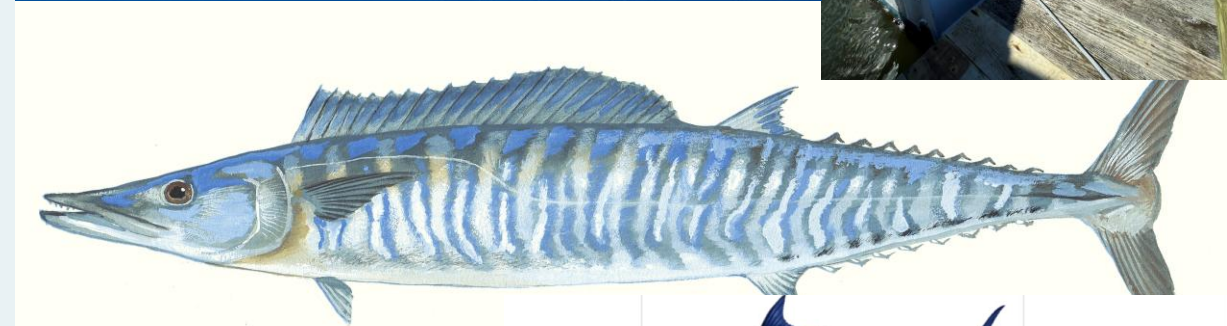


- Trends in the number of for-hire vessels participating in the Dolphin Wahoo fishery vary by region:
 - Increased participation in the Florida Keys.
 - Noted that many for-hire vessels are not federally permitted in South Florida.
 - Decreased participation in full-time charter vessels in the Outer Banks.
 - Overall, have seen an increase in “.com” charter boats and part-time participants that undermine pricing for charter trips.
- The AP noted that up to date permit information is vital for the AP to provide a more thorough recommendation for the Council.

Research and Monitoring Plan



- Incentivize dolphin tagging and incorporate tagging data into management strategy evaluation.
- Monitor for dolphin spawning areas.
- Research range shifts for dolphin.
- Improve recreational data potentially through recreational reporting, a private recreational permit, and requiring tournaments to report all landings.



Other Business: Wahoo Regulations



Spearfishing for wahoo:

- Noted that there was growing concern over increasing spearfishing effort directed towards wahoo off the Florida Keys.
- This was also captured in the most recent [fishery performance report for wahoo](#).
- One potential recommendation was to only allow the use of pole spears when spearfishing for wahoo.

Minimum size limit for wahoo:

- The AP asked about the status of their recommendation of a 24" minimum size limit for wahoo.
 - Also captured in the fishery performance report for wahoo.
- Reiterated that this was a unanimous recommendation of the AP.

Other Business: Commercial Dolphin Regulations



Matching HMS regulations in the pelagic longline fishery for dolphin:

- It was recommended that the Council consider matching HMS regulations in the pelagic longline fishery for dolphin.
 - Make regulations consistent between HMS and non-HMS permitted vessels.

Implement a year-round commercial trip limit:

- Some AP members noted that a year-round commercial trip limit should be considered for dolphin to support sustainability of the stock and avoid localized depletion.
 - In response, a commercial AP member noted a low trip limit had the potential to “make or break” the profitability of a trip.

Questions?



Photo Credit:
Cameron Rhodes