



Amendment 12 to the Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic

(Add Bullet Mackerel and Frigate Mackerel as Ecosystem Component Species)

Decision Document

Background

Summary of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council's previous discussions on bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel

In March 2018, the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Mid-Atlantic Council; MAFMC) requested that the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (South Atlantic Council; SAFMC) consider managing bullet mackerel (*Auxis rochei*) and frigate mackerel (*Auxis thazard*) as ecosystem component (EC) species in the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Dolphin and Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic (Dolphin Wahoo FMP). This request occurred after the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) disapproved inclusion of these two mackerel species in the Mid-Atlantic Council's Unmanaged Forage Omnibus Amendment.

At the December 2018 meeting, the Dolphin Wahoo Committee of the South Atlantic Council (Committee) received a presentation on the presence of the two mackerel species in the diets of dolphin and wahoo and discussed the request from the Mid-Atlantic Council to manage bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as EC species in the Dolphin Wahoo FMP. At the March

2019 meeting, the Committee discussed a white paper on mechanisms and regulatory parameters for adding EC species to a FMP, ways that other Councils have addressed EC species in their FMPs, as well as background information on fisheries for bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel. The Committee voted to send the topic of adding bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP as EC species out for scoping in the spring of 2019.

During scoping, 117 comments were received with the vast majority of commenters expressing support for the Council adding the two mackerel species as ecosystem components. Over the next several meetings, the Committee developed the amendment and discussed potential regulatory measures. Upon receiving guidance from NMFS on the Council's ability to designate bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as ecosystem component species and implement associated regulatory measures, the Committee decided to move forward with a single action in the amendment and selected a preferred alternative that would designate bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as EC species in the Dolphin Wahoo FMP.

Action in this amendment

Amendment 12 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic (Dolphin Wahoo FMP) proposes to add bullet mackerel (*Auxis rochei*) and frigate mackerel (*Auxis thazard*) to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP and designate them as ecosystem component species.

Objectives for this meeting

- Review public hearing comments
 - Note: Public hearings will take place as part of the public comment session held on Wednesday, September 16, 2020 starting at 4:00 PM.
- Modify the document as appropriate
- Consider recommending for formal review

Expected amendment timing

March 2020	NMFS provided guidance on parameters of the South Atlantic Council's ability to add EC species to an FMP and implement regulatory measures. The Committee reviewed the amendment and selected a preferred alternative.
June 2020	Reviewed the amendment and approved for public hearings to be held at the September 2020 meeting.
September 2020	Review public hearing comments, modify the amendment as appropriate, and consider approving for formal review.

Purpose and Need statement

The *purpose* and *need* is to add bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel to the Fishery Management Plan for the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic as ecosystem component (EC) species to acknowledge their ecological role as forage fish.

Committee Action:

- NONE REQUIRED

Action and Options

Amendment 12 to the Fishery Management Plan (FMP) for the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery of the Atlantic (Dolphin Wahoo FMP) proposes to add bullet mackerel (*Auxis rochei*) and frigate mackerel (*Auxis thazard*) to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP and designate them as ecosystem component (EC) species.

Option (No Action). There are no ecosystem component species in the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan of the Atlantic.

Preferred Option 2. Add bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel to the Dolphin Wahoo Fishery Management Plan of the Atlantic and designate the two mackerel species as ecosystem component species.

Summary of the Environmental Effects:

Biological Effects

- Landings of bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel are relatively inconsequential.
- Bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel can be EC species because they do not require conservation and management (see Appendix A in the amendment document).
- The South Atlantic Council decided to list them in the Dolphin Wahoo FMP to achieve ecosystem management objectives. This follows specifications for EC species found in the National Standards under 50 CFR 600.305(d)(13).
- The EC designation recognizes the ecosystem role of these mackerel species particularly for wahoo.
- No direct or indirect adverse impacts are expected from the EC species designation on species listed under the Endangered Species Act or Marine Mammal Protection Act including their critical habitat.
- Public education and awareness of the EC designation may encourage reporting landings of these two mackerel species more than before, providing some biological benefits.
- Biological benefits could be attained from the raised awareness among the fishers, fishing communities, data collecting agencies, and regulatory entities.

Economic Effects

- There are no anticipated direct economic effects from designating bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as EC species. Such a designation would not affect landings for the two mackerel species.
- There would be potential indirect economic benefits of designating bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as EC species if this designation leads to better monitoring of landings through public education and increased awareness.
- There are no known costs associated with this action outside of the public costs of regulations.

Social Effects

- Designating bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as EC species in the Dolphin Wahoo FMP is not anticipated to result in direct positive or negative social effects.
- EC species designation may have indirect social benefits as it could foster timelier decision making and ensure management is streamlined should management measures be deemed necessary in the future.
- In relation to the numerous public comments in support of the action, acknowledging the key role these mackerel species play in supporting an important commercial and recreational fishery would improve stakeholder perceptions of management efforts.
- The overall social effects should be positive for both the recreational and commercial sectors as the EC designation recognizes the ecosystem role of these mackerel species as prey for wahoo while not requiring unnecessary management constraints for a species that is currently rarely encountered in the Atlantic.

IPT Recommendations/Comments:

- None

SSC/Advisory Panel Recommendations:***Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel***

The Dolphin Wahoo Advisory Panel (Dolphin Wahoo AP) met via webinar on August 22, 2019, and was provided information on the South Atlantic Council's consideration of adding bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as EC species in the Dolphin Wahoo FMP, including background information on the two mackerel species and options that the South Atlantic Council was initially considering in Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 12.

The Dolphin Wahoo AP expressed general support for designating bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as EC species, with some members noting that in their experience wahoo particularly target the *Auxis* species as forage. The Dolphin Wahoo AP felt that the South Atlantic Council should consider a "conservative approach" that would help ensure there are not major increases in the harvest of bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel.

The Dolphin Wahoo AP made the following motions:

MOTION: RECOMMEND THAT THE SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL DESIGNATE BULLET AND FRIGATE MACKEREL AS ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES IN THE DOLPHIN WAHOO FMP. ALSO THE AP ENDORSES THAT THE SOUTH ATLANTIC COUNCIL PROACTIVELY PROTECTS THE SPECIES AS PREY.
APPROVED BY AP (6 IN FAVOR/0 OPPOSED/1 ABSTENTION)

MOTION: CONSIDER REGULATORY ACTIONS IN CONJUNCTION WITH ADDING BULLET AND FRIGATE MACKEREL AS ECOSYSTEM COMPONENT SPECIES.
APPROVED BY AP (6 IN FAVOR/0 OPPOSED/1 ABSTENTION)

Habitat Protection and Ecosystem- Based Management Advisory Panel

At the November 2018 meeting of the Habitat Protection and Ecosystem-Based Management AP (Habitat AP), presentations were made outlining the scientific data identifying the importance of frigate mackerel and bullet mackerel as forage for wahoo and dolphin. In keeping with renewed efforts by fisheries management entities to proactively address potential threats to currently unmanaged species in addition to the growing emphasis on developing ecosystem management approaches the Habitat AP recommended that the South Atlantic Council begin monitoring landings of bullet and frigate mackerel.

This topic was revisited by the Habitat AP at the May 2019 meeting. The Habitat AP recommended that the Council take proactive actions for bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel due to sound existing science regarding their importance as prey for wahoo and dolphin. Additionally, the Habitat AP decided that a dedicated scientific study should target bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel in conjunction with other identified forage prey to enable the future development of comprehensive FMPs.

Scientific and Statistical Committee

The South Atlantic Council's SSC was presented background information on Dolphin Wahoo Amendment 12 during their October 2019 meeting. The SSC discussed the amendment and recommended adding bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP as EC species.

Public Comments:

Scoping was held in May 2019 to gather public comments on the concept of adding bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP as EC species. The Council received 117 comments during scoping, with the vast majority of commenters expressing support for the Council adding the two species as ecosystem components. A full review of the scoping comments can be found by clicking [HERE](#) and reviewing the comment summary under the Dolphin Wahoo folder. The following is a summary of scoping comments relevant to adding bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP as EC species:

Comments in support:

- General support expressed for adding the *Auxis* species to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP as an EC species. Also, general support for protecting forage species.

- The *Auxis* species are not only important forage for wahoo and dolphin, but also are forage for other large pelagic predators such as billfish and tunas.
- These large pelagic predators support the offshore charter, private recreational, tournament, and commercial fisheries that are important economic components of many coastal communities.
- The *Auxis* species not only contribute to the stocks of wahoo, dolphin, and other large pelagic predatory species by maintaining the health of these stocks but also serve as a means to aggregate and maintain these predators in a general area so they are accessible to fishery participants.
- Protecting bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel is a concrete way that the Council can put policies from the Fishery Ecosystem Plan (FEP) II into place.
- Adoption of bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as EC species in the Dolphin Wahoo FMP would be a proactive approach.

Comments in opposition:

- There was some limited concern that the Council was creating or authorizing a new fishery for the *Auxis* species. While this is not the case and the two species are currently unmanaged, this perception generally accounted for the relatively few comments provided in opposition to adding the *Auxis* species to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP as EC species.

At the direction of the Dolphin Wahoo Committee at the June 2020 meeting, Amendment 12 was approved for public hearings to be held at the September 2020 meeting. These comments will be made available to Committee members primarily via the online public comment form that will open two weeks prior to the meeting and during the public comment session that is scheduled to take place on Wednesday, September 16, 2020 starting at 4:00 PM.

Council Rationale:

- The South Atlantic Council took up the action of adding bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP as EC species in response to a request from the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council.
- Examined dietary information for dolphin and wahoo as well as regulatory measures taken by other fishery management Council's to address unmanaged forage species as ecosystem components within their respective FMPs.
- Initially the Council explored potential regulatory measures that could accompany incorporating bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as EC species but did not pursue these measures after receiving guidance from NMFS and further considering the potential implications of such measures.
- The Council concluded that **Preferred Option 2** best meets the purpose and need of the amendment to acknowledge the ecological role of bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel as forage fish.
- The Council noted that the two mackerel species have been documented as important forage species particularly for wahoo and to a lesser extent for dolphin (Rudershausen et al. 2010; Poland, S. J. 2014; Poland et al. 2019).
- This action is backed by peer reviewed literature, recommendations from the South Atlantic Council's SSC as well as Dolphin Wahoo and Habitat APs, and numerous public comments

in favor of adding bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel to the Dolphin Wahoo FMP as EC species.

- Furthermore, it has been noted that bullet mackerel and frigate mackerel are currently not in need of conservation and management, making them eligible for consideration as EC species under provisions found within the National Standard Guidelines and complying with the requirements of the Magnuson-Stevens Act and other applicable law.

Committee Action:

- REVIEW COUNCIL RATIONALE AND MODIFY AS APPROPRIATE.
- CONSIDER RECOMMENDING AMENDMENT 12 FOR FORMAL REVIEW.

DRAFT MOTION: APPROVE AMENDMENT 12 TO THE FISHERY MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR THE DOLPHIN WAHOO FISHERY OF THE ATLANTIC FOR FORMAL SECRETARIAL REVIEW AND DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT AS NECESSARY AND APPROPRIATE. GIVE STAFF EDITORIAL LICENSE TO MAKE ANY NECESSARY EDITORIAL CHANGES TO THE DOCUMENT/CODIFIED TEXT AND GIVE THE COUNCIL CHAIR AUTHORITY TO APPROVE THE REVISIONS AND RE-DEEM THE CODIFIED TEXT.