



THE SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

King and Spanish Mackerel Fishing Tournaments

Law Enforcement Advisory Panel

January 2024

Background

The Fishery Management Plan for Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources in the Gulf of Mexico and Atlantic Regions (CMP FMP) does not allow king and Spanish mackerel harvested in the state-permitted tournament to be sold for profit, however, they may be donated to state or federal dealer. The dealer who accepts these tournament-caught fish must be permitted and comply with all transfer and reporting requirements. Federally permitted dealers are able to receive donated fish from a non-federally permitted vessel.

The dealer then must donate the monetary value (sale price or cash equivalent of value) from the sale of a tournament-caught fish to a charitable organization, as determined by the state. The monetary value cannot be used to pay for tournament expenses. Additionally, fish must be handled and iced according to the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) standards and reported as “tournament catch” to comply with federal and state reporting requirements.

Recently, the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) has received public comment expressing concerns about king and Spanish mackerel fishing tournaments, specifically

the sale of tournament caught fish. At their December 2022 meeting the Council requested NMFS provide information on king and mackerel tournament landings over the last ten years and how those landings, especially any tournament sold fish, were accounted for against the annual catch limit. The SEFSC worked with state agencies to provide tournament landings over the last ten years, specifically South Atlantic tournament landings in the commercial data streams (trip tickets through ACCSP) (**Appendix A**). Additionally, the Council asked the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel (AP) to discuss the role tournaments play in their communities.

Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel Comments

- King mackerel tournaments have been an important part of recreational fishing in Florida for many years. In the early late 1990s there were thousands of boats participating in individual tournaments, but the recession significantly decreased participation and now you only see a few hundred boats.
 - That decrease has been rebounding in recent years, and tournaments are moving to new formats (one-day vs. two-day tournaments, establishing boundaries so large boats cannot outcompete small boats, etc.)
 - Some AP members felt that tournaments have become big business and moved away from the traditional community focus.
 - AP members felt the average weights provided by the SEFSC/states were low.
- Commercial AP members noted that king mackerel tournament sales have a significant impact on the market price fishermen are able to receive for king mackerel. The king mackerel market is sensitive to the number of fish available and when tournament caught fish flood the market the price will drop.
 - The drop in price happens overnight, but it can take the market weeks to recover.
 - Concern that tournament caught fish are not being handled according to Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HAACP) standards and may hurt the reputation of king mackerel as safe seafood for the entire industry.
- It was noted that tournament sales do not incentivize catch and release. However, tournaments are conservation minded and there needs to be something to do with the king mackerel that are landed to prevent any waste.
- Tournaments also increase the number of boats in the water (creating user conflict) because participants will come up early to pre-fish the tournament.
- It was noted that enforcing the sale of tournament caught fish is incredibly challenging and some AP members are concerned that tournament fish are being sold illegally (not through the process designated in the CMP FMP) and that the money from the sale of tournament caught fish is not being donated to charity and/or being used to cover tournament expenses.

MOTION 4: END THE SALE OF TOURNAMENT CAUGHT KING AND SPANISH MACKEREL

MOTION APPROVED (8-1-1)

MOTION 5: ASK THE COUNCIL TO HAVE THE LAW ENFORCEMENT AP DISCUSS ILLEGAL TOURNAMENT SALES OF KING MACKEREL.

MOTION APPROVED (UNANIMOUS).

Questions for the Law Enforcement Advisory Panel

1. Have you noticed any change in number of (or popularity of) king and Spanish mackerel fishing tournaments over the last five years?
2. What level of law enforcement is typically present during king and Spanish mackerel fishing tournaments?
 - a. Does law enforcement monitor fish that may be donated to a dealer and sold for HAACP violations?
3. What role does law enforcement play in regulations related to the sale of tournament caught king and Spanish mackerel are followed?
 - a. Are there challenges related to enforcing these regulations?
 - b. To your knowledge, is there an issue with illegally sold tournament-caught king and Spanish mackerel?

Appendix A: King Mackerel Tournament Landings

- Compiled by SEFSC Fisheries Statistics Division
- Contact: Alan Lowther (alan.lowther@noaa.gov)
- Data for North Carolina, Georgia, and Florida provided by state fisheries management agencies.
- Data for South Carolina was not provided as this (tournament landings on trip tickets) does not occur in South Carolina.

North Carolina Tournament Landings

Table 1. North Carolina king mackerel tournament landings, 1999-2022.

Year	King Mackerel Tournaments	All Tournaments w/landings	Pounds	Dealers	Estimated avg. weight	Estimated number
1999	11	15	21,954	6	8.2	2688
2000	17	20	55,765	9	8.3	6756
2001	16	23	38,168	8	9.3	4093
2002	22	30	42,238	12	10.5	4006
2003	24	33	36,056	12	7.3	4939
2004	28	36	41,368	13	8.8	4678
2005	22	31	39,268	13	7.3	5378
2006	24	29	29,730	11	10.2	2927
2007	24	30	40,477	10	7.2	5608
2008	17	22	28,392	9	6.5	4401
2009	11	15	23,304	8	7.8	2997
2010	11	14	18,203	9	12.1	1509
2011	12	17	7,330	10	10.3	714
2012	13	16	20,783	10	10.6	1967
2013	10	15	20,152	8	12.6	1605
2014	13	16	24,704	9	10.1	2453
2015	15	18	30,965	8	10.7	2881
2016	13	17	28,981	9	11.4	2553
2017	21	25	35,482	9	8.3	4296
2018	17	21	37,581	6	8.7	4315
2019	21	23	45,994	6	8.9	5162
2020	19	20	46,687	7	10.1	4636
2021	20	21	52,904	8	8.1	6526
2022	20	21	37,897	5	9.2	4114

Data notes: Data provided by the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries. NC does not collect landings from every tournament. They collect landings from tournaments that sell their catch to a dealer. Tournaments who sell the catch are required to obtain a special license

allowing them to sell that catch. The dealers that the tournaments sell to are then required to report those landings on trip tickets, with the tournament license number recorded on the trip ticket. There may be more king mackerel tournaments occurring that do not sell their catch, in which case, those landings would not be reported here. NC does not report numbers of fish.

The values in the King Mackerel Tournaments Count column are a count of the distinct number of tournament license numbers with king mackerel landings on trip tickets for each year. The All-Tournaments W/Landings column shows the number of distinct tournament license numbers with trip ticket landings.

These data begin in fall of 1999, the numbers for 1999 may not be complete (but most tournaments do occur in the fall). Estimated numbers are based on SEFSC calculations using estimated average weights calculated from TIP length sampling and the most recent King mackerel SEDAR length-weight equation.

Georgia Tournament Landings

Table 2. Georgia king mackerel tournament landings, 2014-2022.

Year	Number of tournaments	Pounds	Estimated avg. weight	Estimated number
2014	2	668	10.1	66
2015	5	903	8.8	102
2016	4	717	9.2	78
2017	5	980	8.1	122
2018	4	3800	8.2	463
2019	5		8.6	0
2020	5	1247	9.2	135
2021	5	1580	8.7	183
2022	5		8.7	0

Data notes: Data provided by the Georgia Department of Natural Resources Coastal Resources Division. These data reflect what is in the ACCSP Data Warehouse including missing values for 2007 and 2022 Georgia reports there has been some confusion with tournament mackerel and reporting.

In Georgia, the proceeds from selling the tournament mackerel fish have to be donated to a charitable cause. The dealer acts as the sales agent and does not take a cut (does not have a business interest).

Estimated numbers are based on SEFSC calculations using estimated average weights calculated from TIP length sampling for the Atlantic coast from North Carolina to Florida (since there are very few Georgia records in the database) and the most recent King mackerel SEDAR length-weight equation.

Florida Tournament Landings

Table 3. Florida king mackerel tournament landings, 2001-2022.

Year	King Mackerel Tournaments	Pounds	Dealers	Estimated avg. weight (lbs)	Estimated number
2001	1	CONF	1	8.8	N/A
2002	3	CONF	1	8.8	N/A
2003	0	0	0	8.9	0
2004	0	0	0	9.7	0
2005	0	0	0	8.8	0
2006	0	0	0	9.6	0
2007	0	0	0	9.2	0
2008	0	0	0	9.5	0
2009	0	0	0	9.0	0
2010	1	CONF	1	8.7	N/A
2011	0	0	0	9.9	0
2012	0	0	0	10.9	0
2013	0	0	0	12.3	0
2014	0	0	0	10.2	0
2015	1	CONF	1	8.4	N/A
2016	3	CONF	1	8.5	N/A
2017	0	0	0	7.9	N/A
2018	1	CONF	1	7.9	0
2019	2	CONF	2	8.3	N/A
2020	5	22,738	3	8.7	2620
2021	5	13,981	3	9.1	1544
2022	7	15,648	5	8.6	1817

Data notes: Data provided by the Florida Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. If fish are caught in a tournament and the dealer wishes to sell the catch and donate the profits to charity, they must obtain a mackerel tournament donation permit (<https://myfwc.com/license/saltwater/mackerel/>). One of the requirements is that there must be an associated trip ticket. These landings can be identified by trip ticket numbers beginning with "TN".

The values in the King Mackerel Tournaments Count column are a count of the distinct number of tournament trip tickets with king mackerel landings for each year. Florida was not asked to provide information to populate the All-Tournaments W/Landings column. Florida began using the "TN" code for trip tickets generated from tournaments beginning in 2001. Estimated numbers are based on SEFSC calculations using estimated average weights calculated from TIP length sampling and the most recent King mackerel SEDAR length-weight equation."