

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

MACKEREL COMMITTEE

**Avista Resort
North Myrtle Beach, SC**

September 19, 2007

SUMMARY MINUTES

King & Spanish Mackerel Committee Members:

David Cupka, Chair

Benjamin "Mac" Currin

George Geiger

Tom Swatzel

Dr. Roy Crabtree

Dr. Brian Chevront

Rita Merritt

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Lt. Brian Sullivan (Liaison for Lt. Chad Brick)

John Wallace

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John Carmichael

Kim Iverson

Gregg Waugh

Mike Collins

Observers/Participants:

Monica Smit-Brunello

Dr. Joe Kimmel

Dr. Jack McGovern

Margot Stiles

Dr. Tom Jamir

Bob Gill

Dick Brame

The Mackerel Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened in Ballroom B and C of the Avista Resort, North Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, Wednesday afternoon, September 19, 2007, and was called to order at 3:10 o'clock p.m. by Chairman David Cupka.

Mr. Cupka: The information for the Mackerel Committee meeting is behind Tab 10 and the first order of business will be Approval of the Agenda. Are there any additions or changes to the agenda? Seeing none, then the agenda is approved. Next, we'll approve the minutes from the last meeting, the June meeting. Are there any additions or corrections to the minutes of the June meeting? Seeing none, then the minutes are approved.

Gregg, do you want to give us an overview of what we've got to go over today and I'm sure it's not going to take us as long as we've provided on the initial agenda. Some of this we've already done on the SEDAR stuff and whatnot and so hopefully it won't take too long and we can finish Shrimp too.

Mr. Waugh: Attachment 1 is the framework adjustment action and that document has been revised and now it contains one measure and that's to change the start date for the 3,500 pound trip limit in the southern zone for Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel to start on March 1. That document has been revised. The team has completed all of its work and so it's ready to go once you approve it today.

In terms of the geographical allocation of commercial king mackerel quota, we've included some material in the overview. I also have updated information. Joe O'Hop from Florida and Don Hesselman and Alan Bianchi from North Carolina provided their monthly data.

I've got a table put together. We didn't send that out ahead of time because it contains lots of confidential data and so we've got a table constructed that protects the confidential data that we will show for that. Really, the SEDAR stuff has all been covered. Tom Jamir will give a status of the aging and fecundity work; just give us a quick update on that. That's about it. I'll cover the change in date for the SEDAR assessment when we get to it.

Mr. Cupka: Thank you, Gregg. Let's go ahead and start, I guess, going through the framework adjustment document, which is Attachment 1. We have Gregg to review that and then we'll decide what action we want to take on it.

Mr. Waugh: Contrary to snapper grouper, this is real easy and real straightforward. Its one action and two alternatives. It's page 5 of 115 in your PDF document. It's amazing that we can get up to 115 pages, but the action is to adjust the commercial Atlantic migratory group Spanish mackerel trip limit and the preferred alternative is to change the start date to begin March 1. As I said the team has gone through the document and revised the document to just reflect this one action and so as far as the team is concerned, it's ready to rip.

Mr. Cupka: You all have that information before you. It is considerably less involved now, since we decided to wait on the next assessment before addressing TACs and whatnot. We just have the

one action and no, we're not going to add any other alternatives.

I guess we'll ask if anyone has any comments on it first and we've been through this before and so there really shouldn't be any surprise to anyone. I guess if there's no comments, we'll ask if anyone wishes to make a motion to move this ahead.

Mr. Currin: **So moved.**

Mr. Cupka: We've got a motion by Mac and a second by George. Is there discussion on the motion? **Is there any objection to the motion? Seeing none, then the motion is approved.** That will take us to our second item here, which is Geographical Allocation of the Commercial King Mackerel Quota.

Again, this is a situation that we were made aware of that when we do get around to adjusting the TAC, if that's what we're required to do as a result of the assessment, there was concern that it may result in a closure and that some of the geographical areas would be impacted a lot more severely than others as a result of this. Gregg has taken a look at this and I'm going to ask him to go over that and lay out the issue and see how we want to deal with it.

Mr. Waugh: The idea here is get some guidance ahead of time. We've got the SEDAR assessment in the works. The expectation is that our TAC that we get out of the SEDAR assessment will be lower than our current TAC of ten million pounds.

Our preferred alternative in the mackerel amendment previously was a TAC of 7.1 million pounds. It's likely looking at the long-term yields that -- The long-term TAC that we get from the SEDAR assessment is going to be closer to seven million pounds than to ten million pounds and so we wanted to get some discussion and guidance ahead of time so we could start looking at how do we deal with this commercial quota and the differential impacts.

In the overview document on page 2 and carrying over to page 3, we've got some of the information that was included in the amendment and I've got updated information that I'll show in one second here, but the idea is the options that we're discussing and would like some input on -- We've heard for snapper grouper some interest in going by state-by-state quotas.

There also may be the ability here to use a semi-annual quota with a quota for the March 1 through October 31 period, because then on the Florida east coast we have that boundary that switches. It drops from the upper Florida east coast down to the Keys area.

What we've done here -- I know these numbers are going to be hard for people in the back to see, but I wanted to show the numbers as well as show this in a graph. If the TAC is 7.1 million pounds, the commercial quota is going to be 2.634 million pounds. What we've got here is the fishing year 2005/2006 and 2006/2007 starting March 1, North Carolina monthly data and the North Carolina cumulative monthly data, Florida data, and these blank months in November, December, January and February in that time period, that's when that line drops.

What you're left with in Florida for Atlantic kings are those three northeast counties and you get into confidential data there and so what we've done is just collapse all that data into the month of February.

This does not include South Carolina and Georgia data, which we will eventually get and include into the analysis, but what we wanted to look at was based on the 2005/2006 catches, the quota of 2.6 million pounds is not met. The 2006/2007 fishing year was quite different. If we look at the monthly catch and, again, this is just North Carolina and Florida, which is the bulk of the fishery, but that quota of 2.6 million pounds, you can see here it would be exceeded sometime in late November or early December.

What this does is you can see that in Florida they're fishing -- The bulk of Florida is fishing on Gulf kings and so there's very little impact in that area, but you can see, depending on when that closure occurs, it can really have a significant impact in North Carolina, to where up to 40 or more percent, depending on when, of their income would be lost. This is a very important fishery at that time of the year for them.

I've got a chart that shows this a little better and hopefully you can see that a little more, but if the quota is about 2.6 million pounds commercially, you're looking at going over somewhere between late November and early December. That's based on the fishing pattern in 2005 and 2006 and 2007.

With all the other regulations, it can shift effort more into king mackerel and so we don't know what the fishing pattern would be ultimately, but you would expect more effort to be transferred to king mackerel.

Mr. Cupka: Any questions for Gregg? Seeing none, then --

Mr. Currin: Not so much a question, David, as just a comment. This is, as Gregg indicated, an extremely important issue for the State of North Carolina. We had some discussions in Snapper Grouper about state-by-state quotas and there's a lot of reluctance around the table to go that way, but we've got to find some way to keep that fishery -- Make sure that fishery is open and there's quota available in North Carolina in those fall months, through December.

I don't know how we do that, whether that's through regional quotas or whether it's by dividing the fishing year into two sections so that it's -- We've got to come up with some way to make sure that there's quota available through December at least.

Dr. Crabtree: Just looking at it, it appears to me that the simplest way to fix this is to have two quotas, something like a spring/summer quota and then maybe have a fall quota or something like that. That's similar to what we did in the Gulf with red snapper, when we used to have a spring quota and a fall quota.

When they caught one, it closed and then it would reopen again. You could take whatever the historical amount of fish caught during those fall months, which is almost all of North Carolina,

and set that proportion of the quota as the fall quota. The Florida guys aren't even fishing on Atlantic kings at that point and it seems to me that's a -- To me, that's a much logistically easier way to go than state-by-state quotas and any of those other things.

I guess there is some chance that fishermen will go to where it's open and fish, but that, just off of my quick look at it, seems to be the most straightforward way to ensure that there are fish available in the fall.

Mr. Currin: Roy, that's a good suggestion and the fact that it's open off of the State of North Carolina and fishermen from South Carolina or Georgia or Florida, for that matter, come up there to fish in it, those guys don't mind a bit. They don't care. It's great and its competition for them and it makes it more fun, I guess. It doesn't bother them at all or it doesn't seem to. Brian, you correct me if I'm wrong, but that's my impression from talking to North Carolina fishermen in general.

Dr. Crabtree: With a fall quota and a spring/summer quota, it would be open everywhere. The fall quota, the whole area would be open. It's just the fish are in North Carolina at that time and that avoids you that problem of closing one area and the other area is open. It seems like it would work.

Mr. Cupka: When Gregg and I first started talking about this, that was something I thought would do it pretty good. In essence, it divides it up geographically, because those fish move at different times of the year and they're in different locations.

You're right that it doesn't reserve a part of the quota particularly for a group of fishermen, but it ensures they have the opportunity to fish on those fish and I doubt very many people are going to go all the way up there from south Florida or whatever, because they'll have the Gulf fish available at that time of the year anyway. It seems like a good way to go.

Dr. Chevront: Getting to the point that Mac was making, in my discussions with North Carolina mackerel fishermen, all that they're really said to me is they want a chance at the fish and as long as something could be set up so that the fish wouldn't all be caught up before the season started up there -- All that I had heard from folks talking about it really was a state-by-state quota.

That was the first thing that sort of popped into everybody's minds. I hadn't talked to anybody specifically about a seasonal quota, but I think perhaps there's a real possibility behind that. I would like to hear what the fishermen think about it at some point, but I think it's got possibilities.

Mr. Cupka: I was just talking with Gregg and I guess what we need to do is come up with some options we can take out to scoping. We're still early in the process and look at how we might address this issue. We say spring and fall fisheries, but given these particular months that are shown here on the second page of this issues paper here, you'll notice some time periods here, March 1 through October 31st and November 1st through the end of February. Are there any other options you think we need to look at?

Dr. Chevront: Can you put those numbers back up again, Gregg that showed the landings by state per month? It really sort of picks up in North Carolina in October and so what you would be doing, by including October in that first quota, is you would be cutting North Carolina out of about -- It looks like almost 25 percent of their fall landings.

Could we maybe adjust it so that October is included in that fall one? You look at the difference there and September is 20,000 and then the next month it's, what, twenty-one times the amount. If we could include October into the fall, I would appreciate that.

Mr. Currin: In looking at the chart there, I assume that's -- How many years? It's 2005 and 2006. We might want to take a look at a few more years in there, to capture any annual variation, but based on this chart at least, it would seem more reasonable to end the first period at the end of August. That would seem to capture, by far, the bulk of the Florida fishery that occurs on the South Atlantic quota. I would suggest that perhaps September would be a -- September or October, somewhere in there. There may be some annual variation that would enlighten that.

Dr. Chevront: I just want to make sure that October gets included in the fall at a minimum. We can negotiate on September. I think Mac's idea is probably a good one, to look at maybe a couple more years to see if there has been a real change over time or not.

Mr. Cupka: Other comments or questions? Is there any other options that the committee would like to see us take a look at, have staff work up and come back?

Mr. Waugh: In the options paper, we've got that semiannual quota. My understanding is we would not use the time period that's laid out there, but we would use the March 1 through August 31 or do you want to look at all of these alternatives? We had March 1 through September 30 and March 1 through August 31.

Dr. Chevront: I'm not sure that we need to look at the one that's actually in there right now that leaves October in the earlier one, because I'm not sure that that really fits. I think starting at September 1 and October 1 I think would be the two alternatives I would suggest, because it does kind of -- Mac brought up a good point. It looks like the Florida fishery on the South Atlantic stock is basically over by the end of August or most of it is.

Mr. Currin: Gregg, I would suggest that for now let's include those two -- Drop the one you had up there initially, but include the one that runs through August and also through September, until we get some further analysis and include a few more years to try to see if there's any annual variation over a broader timeframe that might give us a little better insight into which one of those would be most appropriate.

Mr. Waugh: Any thoughts in terms of how we would allocate the commercial quota between those two time periods? Do you want us just to look at -- For instance, in each year look at the percent of the total catch in that year that was caught in each period? That's the one option that comes to mind, but if there are any others, we would like to hear them.

Mr. Cupka: What about other options? I'm assuming there's no real interest in state-by-state quotas, but I haven't heard that and I don't see anyone making a push.

Dr. Chevront: I think there is interest in that. I think we're talking now in terms of realism in terms of what NOAA Fisheries can actually work out. I'm not ready to completely walk away from state-by-state quotas, but I think what Roy has suggested sounds like it might be a workable compromise, but we haven't seen all the numbers yet and so I don't want to walk away from state-by-state at this point.

Mr. Cupka: What about regional as opposed to state-by-state? Some of the Gulf fisheries are geographically split out. I don't know whether that's easier for NMFS to track something like that.

Dr. Crabtree: The fewer the quotas are and the larger the areas, the easier it is for us. I think if we had a north and south quota, that's easier than having a state-by-state quota. The main thing that's hard for us are very small quotas that can be caught very quickly and when you have that, you have a very high potential for big-time overruns, because it happens so fast we can't react.

Mr. Currin: David, I'm very unfamiliar with the South Carolina commercial mackerel fishery and certainly we would like to make sure that any of these options that we're defining considers South Carolina's fishery as well and any recent trends, global warming or whatever, that may be moving fish from Florida or Georgia up into South Carolina. If there's a blossoming fishery there for mackerel, then we should certainly be aware of that and try to take it into account.

Mr. Cupka: Obviously if we were to look at any regional quotas, we would want to see those numbers and see -- That might give us an indication on where a line should be drawn to make sure we aren't creating any problems. We could certainly look at that. Is there any desire on the part of the committee to look at the idea of a regional quota?

Ms. Merritt: Similar to what we were talking about in the Snapper Grouper Committee, dividing it with Georgia and Florida together and North and South Carolina might be worthwhile.

Mr. Currin: One point I might make is that a lot of that fishery that occurs in the wintertime in North Carolina does occur in the southern part of the state and I'm not so all-fired sure that those guys aren't fishing in South Carolina in fact and landing in North Carolina. I don't know that, but you may have much better handle on it.

It's just because of the orientation of our coast down there that if the guys run south, they're very quickly in South Carolina and I at least know from mackerel tournaments that at times the guys will leave Southport or even further north in North Carolina and fish off of Georgetown, as far as that.

That's a distinct possibility and that would indicate that there's at least an opportunity for South Carolina fishermen there off their own coast during that time of year if they wanted to participate and, again, I don't know how many do.

Mr. Cupka: At one time, we had the Arthur Smith King Mackerel Tournament that operated out of the northern part of our state, which was a huge tournament and it was a fall tournament. Hopefully we'll pick up on that as we look at these landings and whatnot. Where does that leave us, Gregg? What have you got now for things to look at?

Mr. Waugh: What we've got for the options then would be state-by-state quotas. Option 2 would have two sub-alternatives, one running March 1 through September 30 and then October 1 through the end of February. Option 2B would be March 1 through the end of August and then September through the end of February. The third alternative would be regional quotas, looking at Georgia and Florida together and North Carolina and South Carolina.

The way we would initially allocate those landings would be based on the percent caught in each period or each region in each year and bring those ranges to you and you can see what you want to pick from those.

Mr. Cupka: Any additional comments or options anyone would like to see us look at? I think we've got a good range of things here and I think that certainly they'll address the issue and it will give us something to take out and get some reaction. That will take us through that then.

Mr. Waugh: The intent here would be that we would prepare these alternatives as a scoping document and perhaps at the next meeting, depending on our timing, work in a scoping meeting and get some public written scoping comments as well.

Mr. Cupka: That was certainly my thought and the intent. Status of Upcoming SEDAR-16 Assessment, some of this, like the terms of reference, have already been approved by both our council and the Gulf and unless anyone wishes to make any changes in those, which I hope they don't, we'll go along with those. Status of Appointments, we went over some of that in the SEDAR Committee and I don't know what we need to necessarily revisit that, unless you --

Mr. Waugh: No, but I just wanted to make sure that everybody is aware of the change in the review workshop. It was scheduled for August 11th through the 15th and it's now August 4th through 8th. That's the only item.

Mr. Geiger: If I could just make a general statement. For any council members who have not been to a SEDAR, I think it's extremely important that you sign up for one of those workgroups, at least one, preferably a whole SEDAR, if you can do it and attend them and get a feel for how that process works and how it's conducted. I think it's extremely important.

We've had a couple of SEDARs recently where we've had no council member present and I think it's a disservice to the process and it's important to have a council member view every one of these SEDARs. If you haven't, please step up and it's as important to have a council member there as it is an SSC member.

Mr. Cupka: Thank you, George. That brings us down to the Status of Aging and Fecundity Work. Tom, do you want to bring us up to date on that?

Dr. Jamir: I talked to Doug Devries at the Panama City Lab. They were out at sea and so I had to get an abbreviated version of what they were working on. Basically, through cell phone connections and other connections in between, I was able to get his update. Basically, he said that from samples of thousands of king mackerels that they sampled from hydrated females, they were able to get and prepare 166 females, which they think will be enough to produce a size-based batch fecundity estimate. This will be for both the Gulf and Atlantic females.

The Panama City Lab is still assembling data, since a lot of them were collected and sent to us from the last summer's batch collection. They're still assembling them to see if we can make any estimates of spawning frequency. With respect to the SEDAR rush job to have it completed for the coming meeting, they said that the aging of king mackerel samples for SEDAR has completed and at the moment, data entry, audit and assembly are being prepared, so that it can make it for the SEDAR process. That's their update.

Mr. Cupka: That's good to hear. Are there any questions for Tom?

Mr. Currin: Tom, if I understood you correctly, you had 160 fecundity samples or egg samples for both the Gulf and the Atlantic. I assume they're distributed roughly --

Dr. Jamir: Yes, that's what they told me, is that they're trying to get a batch fecundity for both the Gulf and South Atlantic out of the thousands of samples that they collected.

Mr. Currin: I assume then that they've selected those so that they've got what they feel at least is a very good representation of the size range in both the Gulf and the Atlantic, within the 160.

Dr. Jamir: When I asked them about that, they said they believe that they'll get a good representative sample and get the fecundity estimate or fecundity function out of that.

Mr. Cupka: Other questions for Tom? Seeing none, then we appreciate that, Tom, and we're certainly looking forward to this next assessment, to see what happens. That brings us down to Other Business. Is there any other business to come before the committee? Seeing none, then the Mackerel Committee is adjourned.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned at 3:45 o'clock p.m., September 19, 2007.)

Certified by: _____ Date: _____

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(Continued on the next page)

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So that we will have a record of your attendance at each meeting and so that your name may be included in the minutes, we ask that you sign this sheet for the meeting shown below.

MACKEREL COMMITTEE MEETING
North Myrtle Beach, SC
Wednesday, September 19, 2007

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