

SOUTH ATLANTIC FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

MACKEREL COBIA COMMITTEE

**Villas by the Sea
Jekyll Island, Georgia
March 6, 2025**

Mackerel Cobia Committee

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Dr. John Walter

Rick DeVictor
Kathy Knowlton
Nikhil Mehta
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Observers and Participants

Other observers and participants attached.

The Mackerel Cobia Committee of the South Atlantic Fishery Management Council convened at the Villas by the Sea, Jekyll Island, Georgia, on Thursday, March 6, 2025, and was called to order by Chairman Tom Roller.

MR. ROLLER: All right, everybody. I'm going to go ahead and call to order the Mackerel Cobia Committee. Just for those listening, and we haven't had this committee in a while, my name is Tom Roller. I'm a council member from North Carolina. In my everyday life, I'm a full-time for-hire operator.

Just as I've done most committee meetings, I just want to take a moment and remind the council how important king and Spanish mackerel are to our region and stakeholders, and, of all the managed finfish species commercially, they are first and second in pounds landed, first and third in ex-vessel value, and, recreationally, they are second and third in directed trips, and so, with that, the first order of business is I'm looking for an approval of the agenda. Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I approve.

MR. ROLLER: Okay. Do we have a second? Amy. Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion passes by consensus. The second order of business is I'm looking for an approval of our minutes from the March 2024 meeting. Robert made that motion. Thank you. Do we have a second for that motion? Gary. Is there any opposition to the motion? Seeing none, the motion passes by consensus. The first item on the agenda is we're going to look at the giant manta ray ESA Section 4 development rule, and I'm going to go pass this over to staff.

MS. WIEGAND: Jenny, we've got you unmuted, and so go right ahead.

MS. LEE: All right. Good afternoon, everyone. Am I coming in clear?

MS. WIEGAND: We've got you loud and clear. Thanks.

MS. LEE: Excellent. All right. Today, I'm here to share an update on the ESA Section 4(d) rule development, and then really some new information. If you go to the next slide, I can share that the new information relates to important habitat, and some information on recreational cobia fishing impacts, and then we'll discuss some Section 7 considerations for the Coastal Migratory Pelagic Resources FMP.

First up, as far as the 4(d) rule goes, in December, we had informed you, through -- I think Andy pointed this out, and it was in our South Atlantic Protected Resources brief, that NOAA Fisheries was considering developing some protective regulations under Section 4(d) of the ESA for giant manta ray, to manage activities, to help preserve and recover the species, and so this is where, as you know, with endangered species, regulations and -- The take prohibition is automatic.

When we have threatened species, we basically have options, so regulations under 4(d) can be -- They can extend some or all of those take prohibitions, and so, at this time, and I guess I should add that our NOAA Fisheries Office of Protected Resources in Silver Spring was leading this effort, with input from our regional offices, such as the one I'm in in the Southeast Region.

We are continuing to collect information on activities that may take giant manta rays, to help conserve and recover the species, but, at this time, we're not pursuing a proposed rule, really, and so, you know, we're gathering information, and continuing to better understand what can -- What we can do to conserve and recover the species, but, if and when we do, you know, get closer to perhaps issuing any type of regulation, then, of course, we would give you sort of a heads-up, and, you know, would be talking with administration, but, at this time, really, you know, we have that new information, and so, since we had the presentation, I wanted to keep that, and I can share a little bit about that and get some feedback from you.

We have new information on giant manta ray reproductive habitat. Last June, Pate et al. published evidence of reproductive and feeding habitat for manta rays off of the Florida Atlantic coast. Each spring, giant manta rays aggregate off the coast of central and northern Florida, between Indian River County and the Florida-Georgia border.

Typically, individuals are observed during March of each year in coastal waters off Indian River County, and then they migrate northward, possibly coinciding with rising water temperatures. Mating, courting, reproduction, and feeding have all been observed to take place during the seasonal aggregation, and Pate et al. suggests this area is important reproductive habitat, and so this is important, because it's the first documented reproductive habitat in the United States.

I should add that you have this publication, as well as the next publication I'm going to talk about, in the additional materials. Hopefully you got a chance to read those through, when you were looking at the breaking book, but they're there, if you didn't, for future reference.

Then so we've known that recreational cobia anglers likely interact with manta rays along the east coast, but we didn't really fully understand the extent of those interactions. We are getting some new information, and the study gathered data here on angler knowledge, perceptions, and behavior in relationship to the cobia fishery in central and northern Florida and its relationship with resident migrating giant manta rays. Again, also, this -- Again, this is the same area that we're talking about with the reproductive habitat.

The new study documents that cobia fishing practices are resulting in entanglement injuring disturbance to giant manta rays in the region. There were -- It is based on only -- There was fifteen anglers that were part of the study. 86 percent interviewed indicated that they or their charter clients had hooked manta rays, and I guess I should add a lot of the people interviewed were actually captains, and so not individual anglers, but people in the business.

Then 91 indicate -- 91 percent indicated that they had seen manta rays with hooks. In fact, they go as far as to describe them that's looking like Christmas trees, or Mardi Gras, because they have lines and, you know, ornaments all kind of hung up on them, and so another issue it raises is overcrowding. There's an average maximum of twenty-two boats, ranging from one to fifty, right around the manta rays, and then social media is identified as kind of at least a perceived key driver of expansion of this practice.

If you go to the next slide, and so I'm not going to play any of these video clips for you, but, if you were to do a keyword search on "manta ray" and "cobia" in any of the social media platforms, you come up with a lot of different pages of videos promoting this fishing practice of basically

using the giant manta ray, to cast at them, or sometimes even right on top and pop the line along, as a way to catch cobia underneath.

Braun et al. noted that experienced anglers pointed to social media actually as a key driver of the expansion of the practice and as an explanation for why they have this perceived notion of it being a growing issue for novice anglers that were engaging in this practice.

I mentioned, you know, that, at this time, we're -- You know, there's no imminent 4(d) rule coming out that would relate to this, but we do have our Section 7 considerations to think about. I know, or I think, most of you are familiar with the ESA/MSA integration policy that NOAA Fisheries and staff worked on to help engage early information into the Section 7 process.

There's actually one of the appendices in that guidance that talks about evaluating new information and, again, early coordination and cooperation, and so part of why I'm here sharing this is to make you aware, so that we can, you know, discuss it and kind of work together on if there's any potential need for action, but Sustainable Fisheries and Protected Resources -- So we're working together to evaluate if the reinitiation of the formal Section 7 consultation on the CMP biological opinion is needed, based on the new information.

You remember, in 2023, you received the amended opinion that addressed giant manta ray, and also oceanic white tips. In that opinion, it does recognize the general practice, but these recent papers, you know, were not available then, and we have a lot of additional information, and so we need to look at that and sort of assess whether we need to reinitiate consultation.

The only other thing I would add, related to that, is that the BiOp had really highly uncertain interaction numbers. They're actually quite large, because they were based on, you know, like a discard logbook data point, one point or something, extrapolated, and so -- The BiOp, I think, uses like a -- It's close to like 8.5 percent is the mortality rate applied, and so I don't know, and just, you know, we're not sort of in a position where I'm -- I'm not here to say we've exceeded our take, you know, and I don't really think that's even true, but it's more of there's new information out there that we need to look at and figure out how that relates.

The articles -- The article referenced talks about, you know, the fishery being managed by FWC, and so it's talking more about the state fishery off of Florida. As you know, of course, cobia trips under the under the BiOp only include east Florida, since the Atlantic migratory group of cobia is no longer federally managed, and so, really, you know I'm here today to share the information and just try to get a little feedback from you on how your experiences compare to the Braun et al. findings.

You know, in the in the article, it mentions that, you know, it's really focused on this one area off of the Florida east coast, and I think it actually even says like south Florida maybe doesn't seem to be as prevalent of a fishing practice, but that's -- Again, we're kind of looking to you for some information on -- You know, on sort of what you've perceived about this. Is it limited to off the Florida east coast? We're trying to get a sense of how far offshore this practice is used and, you know, whether it's extending into federal waters, any best practices, or thoughts, and, you know, we're really, again, just trying to get a feel for, you know, the situation and what we might need, and so, you know, what avenues do you see available to reduce interactions and disturbances?

I didn't add a closing slide, but I do encourage you, you know, to have some discussion here, and also to reach out to me, and Calusa Horn is the manta ray recovery coordinator, and she's on the line. If there's any real specific questions, I will point to her, you know, but we're trying to, again, just see and encourage you to report any information you have, actively contribute to research initiatives in the area, and there's a lot going on right now, and so, you know, the more you're engaged, the more we can collectively all have the best available information to guide us as we work on best strategies and practices.

I think that's all I will say, and hopefully you guys will jump in with some nice information here that you could share, but a few questions, of course, and we can answer those too, and that officially concludes the report. I mean, I don't have any more slide.

MR. ROLLER: Okay. Thank you so much, Jenny. I'm going to go ahead and open the floor to questions and comments and discussion. Go ahead, Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I guess I would say that, off of Florida -- I mean, we definitely hear about people following manta rays to catch cobia. We don't hear about people actually, you know, hooking them, although I'm sure that that happens, but we're not hearing about that. What we've heard about so far, it looks like it might be more in state waters, near beaches, but I'm wondering if we could ask our AP about this, or try to get some more feedback, and we could try to get additional feedback in Florida as well, and then maybe the AP could suggest some best fishing practices for this.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Jessica. I would note that it is an agenda item for our upcoming CMP AP. I'm going to go to you, Jimmy, but I'm just going to make a comment here from North Carolina. You know, this practice is limited to the Florida east coast, and, you know, in North Carolina, we do see manta rays. I don't see them a lot, personally, and I see a few a year, and it is common practice to try to catch cobia off of them, but what I would note is, you know, going back to the slides about social media, you know, pushing this practice, what I would say is social media pushes, and identifies, places where you can catch fish.

I don't think it's necessarily directly related to manta rays. You know, in my area, cobia fishing is very popular, and what I find so interesting about cobia is that, for some reason, this fish, that people have this rabid desire to fish for, and, a lot of times, when fishing for a certain species is poor, you'll see effort go down, but, at least where I'm at, even when the cobia fishing is poor, you still see a lot of people trying to catch the few that are there. When we -- You know, in North Carolina, people tend to focus on sea turtles, as well as menhaden bait balls, and it's nothing to see dozens of boats that -- You know, particularly at high fishing effort times, like weekends, and so I'm going to go to Jimmy.

MR. HULL: Thank you. I agree with everything that you said on that, and it is -- Off of Ponce Inlet, it's in state waters, predominantly, along the beach, and, you know, I've done a lot of this, and it's a real productive way to target cobia, and it gets more popular every year. It's almost too popular. You know, there's just too many boats, and it spooks the rays, and, once you do hook a ray, it's pretty much over. They dive, and then they go deep, and so the object is to not hook the ray, right, but it happens, because, you know, that's how it's done.

I know, when we do it, we've kind of perfected it to where you get the wind behind your back, and the sun behind your back, so you can actually cast properly, and see everything, but it -- There's some people that are really, really good at it, and others that are just first timers, and those are the guys that are going to, you know, hook the ray every time, but this is real. I mean, it happens, and, of course, the next question is how detrimental is it to the ray, when he's got a jig busted off in him, or lots of them.

Well, first, I would say we need to make sure that those jigs have hooks that rust, right, so that -- That would be a requirement, and so the jigs need to be not stainless steel hooks, so eventually they'll rust out, but, other than that, I don't know -- Unless you hit a vital -- Something real vital on the ray -- They're, you know, pretty much a beast, and so -- But it's real.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you for your comments, Jimmy. I think that's interesting to point out for best fishing practice, to make sure that we're using non-stainless steel hooks. I've got a list of names here. I've got Gary, then Judy, then Robert.

MR. BORLAND: I agree with everything Jimmy said there. I would say that they are -- When the rays do push offshore -- I have seen manta rays out past, in federal waters, where cobias could, and do, follow them also, and, obviously, cobias follow sharks and turtles and stingrays and everything else, but they can -- They could be, but I think it's a rare occurrence, in the federal water piece.

MR. ROLLER: I would note, on that, I've seen manta rays from the beach to the Gulf Stream, you know, and, usually anytime you see a big critter, you go look at it, to see if that's cobia behind it. Judy.

MS. HELMEY: I don't really see that many -- I'm off of -- Jenny, I'm off of Savannah, Georgia, and I fish nearshore and offshore, and I see the rays quite a bit, but I don't really see anybody trying to fish around them. They do -- I do see them doing some things, and I maybe was going to ask you if you could tell me what they might be doing but they'll suspend themselves upside downwards, right under the surface, and if you might know what they might be up to.

MS. LEE: They have a lot of fascinating feeding habits. In fact, if you look -- I gave a presentation to the South Atlantic Council, as part of I believe the Shrimp Committee, that I had a lot of information on giant manta rays, and I think probably I characterized some of that. They do something called barrel rolling, which is a surface feeding technique, and so I think that's what you're referring to.

MS. HELMEY: Yes, and they just -- They're schooling, kind of, but they're just kind of suspended right under the water, and you see their white bellies.

MS. LEE: Yes, and they're definitely surface feeders, and so that that sounds like feeding behavior, to me.

MS. HELMEY: Well, thank you very much for your presentation.

MS. LEE: I'm getting a check from my colleague that yes, and she mentions how they have open lobes, to indicate they're feeding, and that's something that you can see.

MS. HELMEY: Great. Thank you very much.

MS. LEE: Sure.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Judy. I'm going to go to Robert.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Thanks, Tom. Just I just noticed in -- I clicked on the YouTube thing, to look at some of the videos, and there's actually the Manta Project in Florida, and they have a best practices video on there, that looked like it was pretty well done, and so something we can look at, and then maybe even look at what we're doing for best practices and include some of that education. I think I've heard enough to hear that this is something folks should be aware of and generally know how to fish around these animals.

MS. LEE: Yes, and those are our partners, and we definitely appreciate any help to support those research initiatives.

MR. ROLLER: Do we have any other hands? I'm going to -- Jenny, I've got one question for you. Have there been any studies on movements of manta rays, like any GPS tagging or anything like that, like population studies?

MS. LEE: That actually I believe Calusa would best answer, and so she does have her hand raised. It's Calusa Horn, if you wouldn't mind unmuting her. She would be able to give the best answer for that.

MS. WIEGAND: Calusa, it looks like you might still be muted on your end. You'll need to hit that uh microphone, and, once it turns green, we should be able to hear you.

MS. HORN: Okay. Can you hear me now?

MS. WIEGAND: There we go.

MS. HORN: Yay. Sorry. Thanks for bearing with me. Thanks for all these great insights. This is great. So, as far as tagging goes, we -- There are two tagging studies that are going on right now. One is more along the Florida east coast. It's more in the north-central Atlantic portion of the species range, in its reproductive habitat, and we are actively working with Florida Manta Project, with the Marine Megafauna Foundation, and with Kennedy Space Center to tag manta rays in that area, and so we're doing some satellite tagging and acoustic tagging of those large adults in that reproductive habitat. Then along -- Further down south, along the east coast, we have a nursery habitat for juvenile manta rays, where we see them fairly regularly, and we're also doing some satellite tagging and acoustic tagging down there as well.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you so much for answering my question. I know, personally, they're just a creature that I'm so fascinated to see, and, every time I get to -- Every time I see one, I'm over-the-moon happy, and so thanks again. Do we have any -- Amy.

MS. DUKES: Just to bring in the last state's perspective to this, and the questions being asked, as far as are these practices limited to only Florida's east coast, what I can tell you is that, in South

Carolina, we will see manta rays every once in a while. Water clarity, turbidity, is going to definitely be a disadvantage for us. However, when we do see them, oftentimes there may be a cobia, but, as far as this fishing practice is concerned, this is not something that is happening in South Carolina, at least to my knowledge.

MR. ROLLER: Any other any other comments, or questions?

MS. LEE: If it's closing out, I think all I would end is just, again, if you -- If you haven't looked at that publication, the Braun et al. one in particular, I really encourage you to do so. It actually has a lot of -- People are commenting just on cobia fishing itself, and their observations related to cobia fishing off of Florida, and so, in addition to sort of our purposes, and wanting you to look at it, for your own fishery management, you might find it pretty interesting.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you so much, Jenny. With that, I guess we're going to move on to the next agenda item, which is the mackerel port meetings report, and I will hand this over to Christina.

MS. WIEGAND: All right. Thank you. I am excited to talk to you guys today about what we learned through the mackerel port meetings process that we conducted last year, and so, first, just the very briefest of refreshers. The series of port meetings we held in 2024 were done at the request of the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel, who really wanted this council to take some time to try to get a real holistic understanding of what was happening with these two changing fisheries.

This was a really unique sort of effort, in that, usually when we're going out to the public, as you know, there's sort of a management proposal in front of them for them to make comment on, but, in this case, we went into these communities and talked to them, sort of stating that the council stopped all work on management for king and Spanish mackerel until this process is done, and so this is your opportunity to talk about where you want to see these fisheries in five years, ten years, twenty years.

You had developed a series of seven goals and objectives that you hoped to achieve through this, and, sort of for the purposes of discussion at the meetings, we broke them up into roughly three categories, and those are the categories I'm going to talk through today, and so the first of those categories was looking at sort of environmental changes, what fishermen were seeing in terms of where and when these king and Spanish mackerel were showing up, what other environmental parameters seem to be affecting those fisheries and the health of those fisheries.

We also talked to them about management changes, sort of what they wanted to see in terms of the goal, and what should management be trying to achieve, and then what was needed to make these fisheries successful from a management standpoint, and then, finally, we talked to them broadly about sort of fishery dynamics, both commercial and recreational, how do those fisheries operate, why do they operate that way, and what sort of is -- What value are fishermen finding in the king and Spanish mackerel fishery, and so those are roughly sort of the three topics that I'll be going over by area today.

First, I wanted to talk a little bit about the report itself. In its entirety, it's a little over sixty pages, and so it can be tough to get through, and so I wanted to sort of guide you, based on what you're looking for and where you should go, and so, if you're interested in just sort of understanding what's happening with king and Spanish mackerel along the entire Atlantic coast, you're going to

want to look at just the draft meeting report, specifically sort of the similarities and differences section.

If you are interested in just generally what's happening in say the Mid-Atlantic, or generally what are we seeing in Florida, again, you're going to want to look at the draft report for that specific section. If you are interested in digging into the details, and think things like I want to know how St. Augustine fishermen feel about limited access, or I want to know what price per pound fishermen in Manteo are getting for king mackerel, that's when you're going to want to dig into the appendix and go to the specific meeting, and the notes for the specific meeting, that was held in Manteo, and so that's how to sort of navigate this large sixty-page report.

You'll notice I have it listed as a draft report. It is still in draft form, because it's been sent out to all of the fishermen that took the time to attend the port meetings, and they now have an opportunity to comment on it. Of course, there are a lot of varied opinions in that report, and so there may be things that fishermen -- You know, don't meet their individual experiences, but what I really want is for all of the experiences to be included, and properly addressed, and so they have until the end of April to look at it, and let me know if they feel like there's something they talked about that wasn't accurately captured, and that can be added in, and we'll bring you sort of a final version in June.

With that, let's dig into exactly what we did, and so we were able to hold sixteen in-person meetings, visiting eight states, and so you can see, on this map here, that we were really able to visit the entirety of the area where you guys manage Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.

In addition to visiting those eight states, we had six webinar meetings, and we were able to talk to 263 king and Spanish mackerel fishermen, and this statistic is really neither here nor there. I just wanted to note that we took over 160 pages of flip chart notes, and, as you can see, we were also able to talk to a variety of fishermen within the king and Spanish mackerel fishery, with about 43 coming from the commercial sector, 21 percent from the for-hire sector, and 32 identifying as private recreational fishermen.

What I'm going to do now is just sort of very briefly go over the high points of what we learned in sort of each region, or state, and so, for the Mid-Atlantic, we are grouping sort of Virginia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York all together, and, in terms of environmental conditions, one of the things we learned up there really was that this is a late summer and fall fishery, and it has become incredibly consistent.

They always see especially Atlantic Spanish mackerel up there, and it's -- Really, the exact arrival time is dependent on the water temperature, and you'll see this as sort of a reoccurring theme throughout the meetings.

When we talked to them about management changes, it became clear that there was a lot of frustration with the current commercial quota in the northern zone for Mid-Atlantic fishermen. Often, by the time the fish are arriving in late summer or fall, the federal waters commercial quota has already been met, and so they are fishing on, depending on the regulation for their given state, usually a lower 500-pound bycatch limit.

When we talked to them about sort of possible changes to commercial trip limits, or seasons, they

really wanted to make it clear that they would rather have a lower commercial trip limit for Spanish mackerel, as opposed to a shorter season, and, if you look at sort of that appendix, you can see a number of different proposals that were made at some of the meetings, including a weekly trip limit, or just a lower trip limit, for Spanish mackerel.

In terms of fisheries dynamics, it became very clear that Atlantic Spanish mackerel is a very important part of the fishery up in the Mid-Atlantic region, and not just for commercial fishermen, but also for the for-hire sector as well. Commercial fishermen talked about, in Whitestone, Virginia in particular, how Spanish mackerel wasn't just sort of something they casually caught. It's something they target, and it can account for 30 percent of their income, and, at a given time, as much as up to 50 percent. It's a very important fishery for them.

For the for-hire sector, they talked a lot about how people are moving to smaller boats. Getting really far offshore is expensive nowadays, and targeting Spanish mackerel allows them to run multiple trips in a day, and it's great family fishing. That's also a theme that you'll see when we talk about North Carolina in a little bit.

Then, finally, just a mention for Atlantic king mackerel is they see them in the Mid-Atlantic region, and they're around, but, really, it's sort of sporadic, and more of an opportunistic fishery. We didn't really hear from any fishermen that were actively targeting king mackerel.

Moving down the coast a little bit, into North Carolina, it's similar to what we just heard from fishermen in the Mid-Atlantic. Atlantic Spanish mackerel are staying in North Carolina. They're arriving earlier, staying a lot longer, into the fall, and fishermen are hearing about them and seeing them move further north into that Chesapeake Bay region. This is becoming sort of, again, a consistent fishery. You can rely on Atlantic Spanish mackerel being there in the waters off of North Carolina.

Fishermen in North Carolina were incredibly concerned about development of sort of the offshore area. At most of the meetings, there were some mentions of development of offshore wind, and how noise pollution may affect these fisheries, as well as concern about dredging activities that make the water turbid and can result in the fish leaving the area.

In terms of management changes, in North Carolina, similar to the Mid-Atlantic, there were concerns about allocation, both between the commercial and recreational sector, but also between that commercial northern and southern zone. It was really felt that the years that were used to allocate the commercial quota between those two zones were years when a lot of hurricanes went through North Carolina, and so landings were lower, and that the current allocation doesn't really represent the proportion of fishing activity currently.

There was also a lot of talk about the need to improve recreational data collection and accountability. There was frustration about MRIP-FES and a feeling that private recreational fishermen especially were fishing on the same stock of fish as commercial and for-hire fishermen and should be held to the same accountability standards and reporting standards.

Then, finally, again, to mention king mackerel, really they felt like the commercial trip limits, bag limits, size limits for king mackerel were good. There was certainly possibly room for higher

limits, but neither the commercial nor the recreational sector really felt restricted by current management measures.

Then, in terms of fishing dynamics, again similar to the Mid-Atlantic, and king and Spanish mackerel are incredibly important fisheries for the commercial and for-hire industry in North Carolina. For the commercial industry, these are two fisheries that are still accessible, and where you can still get a sufficient amount of poundage across the dock, and for the for-hire fishery, again, you can run multi-day trips, on Atlantic Spanish mackerel especially, and fishermen along the North Carolina coast really rely on access to that fishery to be able to get through the summer and fall months.

Finally, just a little bit of a dynamic that I think is important to note when we talk about limited entry later on. Most of the Atlantic Spanish mackerel harvest is occurring in state waters in North Carolina. Many of the fishermen indicated that they had federal permits, in case they needed to go into federal waters, but they primarily operate in state waters. For king mackerel, that's a little different. There may be some state waters harvest, but there's also substantial federal waters harvest for king mackerel.

Continuing on south, I did group South Carolina and Georgia together, because a lot of what we heard in those two states was similar, the first being that they're seeing sort of fewer Atlantic king and Atlantic Spanish mackerel, especially as the waters are warming inshore. You're having to go further offshore now to see especially king mackerel.

No one really felt that management changes were needed for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel. Tournaments were talked about, but I'm going to get to that sort of later on in the presentation, but, in terms of like trip limits, bag limit, size limits, they really felt like everything was fine. Again, for Spanish mackerel, especially the recreational sector, noting that a smaller bag limit is preferable to a shortened season.

Then, finally fishing dynamics, they're really --King and Spanish mackerel are more opportunistic fisheries for fishermen in South Carolina and Georgia, unlike what I was just talking about in the Mid-Atlantic and the North Carolina region. It's when they -- They have the permits, and it's when they happen across, you know, king and Spanish mackerel, and especially commercial fishermen can sell them, but it's not a heavily, or specifically, targeted species.

Last, but certainly not least, moving into Florida, this is where we're really starting to see some change. When we talked to fishermen in Florida, it was clear that where Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel are showing up has changed substantially over the last five years. That's not to say that the fish aren't around anymore, and it's just where and when they can be found has changed.

They're seeing them stay a lot further north, and there were sort of a number of questions posed, from fishermen that attended these meetings, about whether or not these changes were representing a shift in the range of king and Spanish mackerel or an expansion of the range of king and Spanish mackerel, which I think is something we've talked a lot about with these species.

There was a lot of concern, more so maybe than anywhere else on the coast, about development of the coastal environment having a negative effect on these fisheries. In terms of water quality, there were concerns about dredging, freshwater discharges, and then access to the fishery, and we

had a meeting in Cocoa, and there was a lot of concerns about how space activities are interfering with fishermen's ability to get out on the water, which has become especially concerning for fishermen, as good weather days are becoming few and far between.

For management changes, there were some talks about modifications to commercial trip limits for king mackerel and for Spanish mackerel. For king mackerel, they were interested in seeing things switch from a per-fish limit back to a per-pound limit, and, for Spanish mackerel, there was some talk of getting rid of the step-down system and increasing the total trip limit as well. There was also a lot of talk about limited access, but I'm going to get to that when we talk about similarities and differences along the coast.

Then, in terms of fishing dynamics, again, these are key species for Florida fishermen. A lot of fishermen at these meetings talked about being multigeneration king and Spanish mackerel fishermen. This is what they do. This is their livelihood, and it is one of the few fisheries that is still, again, easy to enter, get poundage on the docks, and there was a lot of talk about how it often makes -- It is easier to get poundage across the dock for king and Spanish sometimes than snapper grouper species.

Then especially -- We heard about this a bit in North Carolina, but especially in Florida, the idea that the king mackerel market is really volatile, and, in Florida, it can be challenging to balance the need for a trip limit that is high enough to make going offshore when the weather is finally decent worth it, while still keeping the price per pound high and not flooding the market, and so there's been sort of a lot of talk about how to manage that from a trip limit standpoint.

Then I wanted to include just a few things about New England. We don't manage in the New England region, but we did hold a series of webinars, just to sort of check in with fishermen up there and see what they were seeing, in terms of king and Spanish mackerel, and it does seem like Spanish mackerel is becoming a bit more of a regular presence in New England. King mackerel still remains really sporadic.

In terms of management changes, they didn't feel like any management was needed in their area right now. They weren't seeing, you know, heavy targeting of these species. They said it might be something the councils should watch, but, right now, there's really no need for management, and the focus should be on what's going on in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Again, in terms of fishing dynamics, they're not caught, but, if they know they're around, they'll catch them. It's sort of an -- You know, it's a boon, and it's an exciting, exotic catch, and so they'll catch them if they see them, but it's not something that's targeted.

So, with that, I wanted to briefly cover sort of what are we seeing that we're hearing all along the coast, and where are all of these different communities sort of on the same page, and the first would be that king and Spanish mackerel are robust and healthy fisheries, and they're some of the only remaining fisheries that are accessible and allow fishermen to make a living.

I feel, after doing all these meetings, I would be remiss in not really emphasizing how clear it was, particularly in the Mid-Atlantic, North Carolina, and Florida, just how heavily these fishermen rely on king and Spanish mackerel and how important they are to their fishing businesses.

The next is that it seems like participation in the commercial sector is stable, or decreasing, and this was talked about sort of in all contexts, but especially with regard to the gillnet fishery. It's an experimental gillnet fishery in Virginia, as well as the gillnet fishery that operates in Florida. They're not really seeing a huge amount of increase in participation for the commercial sector. Alternatively, there has been a significant increase in participation for the private recreational sector, and, again, that's something we heard up and down the coast.

Next, almost every meeting, they talked about the challenges management has caused, in terms of not allowing them to harvest a diverse set of species, and that really -- When the council, or any entity, is putting stringent regulations on one fishery, that's simply pushing effort into another fishery, which, of course, is bad for businesses and for stocks, and really what fishermen want is the ability to diversify their catch.

Next, there was a lot of concern that changes in catch and effort were going to be perceived in stock assessments as an issue with the king or Spanish mackerel stock, and fishermen wanted to make it clear that what that actually is is reflective of challenges getting out on the water, be that the increase in bad weather, making it challenging to get offshore, increasing cost of things like, you know, gas, and tackle, and so those things are driving some of the fluctuations that can be seen in catch and effort.

Finally, a lot of different factors were mentioned as sort of, you know, king and Spanish mackerel show up in our area when, and I would say the most consistent one throughout all the meetings was, not shockingly, water temperature. Water temperature is what's driving when these fish show up, and where.

This one I'm also sure doesn't come as a shock, and sharks are a big problem in the mackerel fisheries. Depredation is not only making it challenging to get fish to the boat, but a number of the for-hire operators and private recreational fishermen talked about how it has just ruined the entire fishing experience, and sometimes they'll choose to not even target king and Spanish mackerel, purely because of issue with sharks, and having to run, you know, over a mile away anytime you have just one shark interaction.

Then, last, but not least, they all talked about how continuing to engage with fishery participants is essential. They really felt like they wanted to see more transparency from the council in how data is collected, how it's used, and why the management decisions that are being made are being made, and so they really encourage sort of continued and regular communication with the communities.

So where are the differences? Where are we really seeing disagreement along the coast? The first one that I think sort of really stood out, to me is that, in the Mid-Atlantic and North Carolina, where king and Spanish mackerel are -- Especially Atlantic Spanish mackerel is consistent, they are regularly available, and you can count on them, whereas, in South Carolina, Georgia, and especially Florida, when and where you're going to see those fish has changed pretty substantially in recent years.

Next up, the king mackerel fishery, I really noticed, is primarily a North Carolina and Florida fishery. We just weren't hearing about it as much in South Carolina and Georgia, and it was almost exclusively talk about Spanish mackerel, and not king mackerel, in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Next is limited entry. We asked about limited entry specifically for the Spanish mackerel permit at most meetings. In the Mid-Atlantic and North Carolina, there was very little interest in seeing limited access for Spanish mackerel. In the Mid-Atlantic, of course, these are some people newly getting into the fishery. They want to retain access to that permit. We also heard a lot about people getting rid of their federal permits, because they want to be able to fish in state waters under the federal closure, and so they've just gotten rid of their federal permits, because federal waters is always closed by the time the fish are up there. In North Carolina, they really felt the economy serves as limited access, and there's no need for management to come in and limit access.

This was very different in Florida. There was a lot of push for limiting the Spanish mackerel permit in Florida, feeling that, when fishing is good, a lot of fishermen will jump into that fishery, and so there was a need to sort of cap participation where it is, because it is a limited resource, a limited resource and limited permits.

In terms of the for-hire permit, I would say -- We didn't hear sort of, you know, North Carolina feeling one way, versus Florida feeling another way, and there were sort of a variety of opinions everywhere we went. By and large, there was support for the benefits that limited access for the for-hire permit could bring, but also concerns, to make sure that the for-hire industry didn't experience some of the limited entry challenges that had been seen in the commercial industry, and also wanting the council to sort of think out of the box, in terms of how they could allow new entrance into a limited access fishery.

Then, last, but not least, tournament sales. These weren't split by area, and they were much more split by sector, with commercial fishermen, again, really expressing a lot of concern about how tournament sales will flood the market and drop the price for king mackerel, concern about illegal behaviors, and are these -- You know, the money for these fish actually going to charity. Fishermen that are, you know, pre-fishing are starting to affect the price earlier, even before the tournament, if they have their commercial permit and will sell while they're pre-fishing. Then concern about poorly-handled fish, and are the fish coming from tournaments meeting HACCP standards.

On the opposite side of that, recreational fishermen really felt that tournaments were integral to their communities. A lot of local charities really rely on the donations they get from king mackerel tournaments, and it's also a really great way to introduce community members to the fishery, and it's an important family event in the area, and no one wants to see wasted fish.

So that was a huge amount of information, but I would say, really, just sort of the top of everything we learned about the mackerel fisheries through this process, and so I do have a couple more slides, to talk about where you guys can go from here with all of this information, but I thought I would pause here for any questions, and, while you're thinking of questions, I just wanted to say a big thank you to everyone who helped make this a success.

There was staff from every single state we visited that helped do outreach, came to the meetings, and the Atlantic States Commission staff was integral, especially once we got up into that Mid-Atlantic region, where we just don't have the same contacts, and then, of course, just council staff other than me, whether it was the other FMP staff, who helped me run these meetings, outreach staff, who helped get the word out, and science staff, who pulled all the information for the data

sheets, and this was really a group effort, and so I just wanted to acknowledge that, but I'm happy to take any questions before moving on to where you guys can go next.

MR. ROLLER: I do have one hand up, but I just want to emphasize a couple things, really quickly, when we're on the on the topic of thank-you's. This has been -- The idea of port meetings is something our AP and our stakeholders have been asking for for a long time in this fishery, because it's such an important fishery.

This was a phenomenal undertaking, and it was so much work from Christina, and staff, and it was an extraordinary success. We had amazing attendance for a lot of these meetings, and the conversations were even better, and so, first of all, thank you, Christina, for putting this, and thanks for the rest of staff. You guys did a great job, and we had a lot of fun the facilitating meetings as well, and so we'll move on to questions, and I've got Kerry.

MS. MARHEFKA: Thanks. Christina, I was lucky enough to attend a couple of these, and I thought they were great. I hope this is a model we can continue to use for other species. The question I didn't hear -- the ones I went to weren't particularly the place you were going to hear this anyway, and one thing I don't have a lot of understanding of, and maybe you've heard about, is the commercial market for king mackerel.

You know, we have -- The way we personally have sold our king mackerel in the past is, you know, direct to restaurants locally, and so I don't have a good understanding of the wider commercial market, where that fish is going, what it's being used for, and did the fishermen speak to that, and, if not, maybe one of these guys can fill me in, that knows more about it.

MS. WIEGAND: I am certainly happy to get input from the many council members that attended a port meeting. My understanding is that it varies by location. A lot of that fish is going up north. Especially in Florida, they talked a lot about how there needs to be a bit of a marketing campaign, for king mackerel especially.

There's a lot of concern about the amount of mercury that might be in those fish, and one of the things the fishermen in Florida really noted is that the council needed to get involved in sort of combating that, and talking about what a great fish mackerel was, because there's not a huge local market for it, and usually the higher-end restaurants want snapper and grouper species, and so a lot of these fish are going north. I will say we did hear that, because of, you know, where and when these fish are coming changes, and sometimes there are fewer fish on the market, and so the price recently has been pretty good for king mackerel.

MR. ROLLER: We did hear a lot of comments on price. A lot of people were saying they were catching less fish, but making a lot more money doing it, I guess, or, you know, the last couple of years anyway. Do we have any other questions? John Walter.

DR. WALTER: Thanks for the presentation, and that was a tremendous amount of outreach, and I'm curious, in terms of the recreational importance, why the fishery is so far from its -- Particularly the recreational fishery, far from its annual catch limit, and did that come up, as to why they're not meeting that, when there's a substantial amount of growth there, and we're talking about growth potential for the fishery. Thanks.

MS. WIEGAND: So I'm say, and this is more me speaking, for Atlantic king mackerel, the current ACL for the commercial and recreational sector is very, very, very high, and so I think that might be, at least recreationally, why they're not meeting king mackerel. For Spanish mackerel, I'm not sure why they're not meeting it. I will say, under the new stock assessment that we're going to talk about in a minute, the recreational sector would be meeting their annual catch limit, and, in fact, would be exceeding it.

MR. ROLLER: Amy.

MS. DUKES: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and, Christina, you and your staff did a great job. We had a good time in South Carolina, and so I appreciate all your efforts. We had we had a lot of bonding time. I did have a question about the tournament fish. I was curious if you were to recall which states, if any, did not allow for the sale of recreationally-caught fish.

MS. WIEGAND: I believe that state might be South Carolina.

MS. DUKES: Am I the only one?

MR. ROLLER: Thank you for that clarification, Amy. I will say -- I've got to give a shoutout to the fishermen from Hatteras, and this was a very -- What would you -- I don't know the word, but it was a very elaborate conversation at the table when we discussed this. I'm going to go to Charlie.

MR. PHILLIPS: John, you asked why they're not catching the fish, and I heard two things at our port meetings. One is sharks just didn't allow them to work -- You know, to fish inshore at all. They just -- They just had to run way offshore, or they couldn't even fish, and, two, fish are not where they historically have been, and I think that applies off of Florida, too.

I mean, where they used to be, they're just not there, whether it's water temperature changes, and I know, ten or fifteen years ago, I used to have a few king mackerel boats that would come up in the summertime and fish off Georgia, and they -- I haven't seen them in years and years and years, and so I think those are two of the reasons why. The fish have moved, and the sharks are just making -- They're not allowing the fishermen to fish.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Charlie. You know, I could comment on that. I attended the North Carolina meetings, and the Virginia meetings, and, you know, while North Carolina fishermen clearly said these fish are, you know, more consistent than they are in the rest of the range, the one big takeaway was there was a lot of -- You know, well, I would say there's some peculiarities.

In North Carolina, you know, you heard, from the Wilmington and the Morehead City and the Hatteras guys, that, yes, they're still there, and the times of year have changed a little bit, and an interesting comment about king mackerel, from the fishermen up in the Oregon Inlet area, which is the northern part of the Outer Banks, is they don't really catch them that much anymore, and they don't really want to even try targeting them, which was kind of interesting to hear that from - - Even from -- You know, those fisheries in Hatteras, versus Oregon Inlet, are very, very different, even though they're pretty close.

You get a lot of different ocean currents there, but, you know, the one preface we heard from fishermen, and there wasn't a lot of talk about wanting to change the limits, and the one big

takeaway was that people wanted that access to them, right, and, particularly with Spanish, I don't think people are keeping anywhere near their limit. They just want to be able to target them when they can. Any other questions? John Walter.

DR. WALTER: I have another comment, because I'm attending both the Gulf Council meetings, where there has been a substantial concern for king mackerel, and I think the General outlined, in his report-out, some of the concerns that were coming up in terms of Gulf king mackerel, and it does seem like there's a concern that they -- That the population may be declining in the Gulf, and that many of the fisheries are not getting their catch limit, and that the fish may have moved, or that there may be some other environmental impact on the population, so much so that the council is actually considering some sort of an action to reduce the catch limits proactively.

They ultimately decided to wait for the stock assessment that's going to be coming out for that guidance, but, because the two stocks are linked in the winter mixing zone, where they both mix, I think it's certainly something that probably this council should pay attention to the dynamics that may be happening in the Gulf. It may be very different in the South Atlantic, but, because of those the linkages during that time period, it's something to probably consider, that there might be environmental changes that are affecting both stocks in some ways. Thanks.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, John. I attended the last Gulf meeting, and that was a pretty intense conversation, and it was a lot of good information, and so any other questions? Final call. Go ahead, Christina.

MS. WIEGAND: All right, and so next steps. This is where the work begins, and so where can you guys go from here? There are a couple of things that need to be completed. First are updates to the Coastal Migratory Pelagic FMP goals and objectives. You started down this process a couple of years ago, but, again, ultimately decided to hold off until this process was completed. The goals and objectives for this FMP have not been updated since the mid 1990s.

The next thing is updating the Atlantic Spanish mackerel catch levels to reflect the most recent stock assessment and SSC recommendations. You guys had started work on an amendment, Framework Amendment 13, which would have updated catch levels based on SEDAR 78 and the SSC recommendations. Again, you ultimately stopped work on that to do this port meetings process, but that's sort of still hanging out there as a needed action.

Then there are some items that are optional, and one would be updates to management measures, based on input received during port meetings, and then you can also consider asking for a presentation from the Gulf Council. They did, as John just alluded to, sort of a series of CMP stakeholder engagement efforts, as a complement to this, and have offered to come present their results to the council, and so there are two ways to go about moving forward.

The first would be to do one single large amendment. This would need to be a full plan amendment, which means it would have to be done in collaboration with the Gulf Council. If you'll remember, CMP is a joint management plan, and so, when it's a plan amendment, both the Gulf Council and the South Atlantic Council have to be on the same page, in terms of actions, and, within that amendment, you could update the CMP FMP goals and objectives, update the Atlantic Spanish mackerel catch levels, and revise management measures, based on port meetings.

The alternative to that would be to do two separate amendments, with the first amendment being restarting CMP Framework Amendment 13 to update those Atlantic Spanish mackerel catch levels. That would not need to go through the Gulf Council, so long as it could continue to be a framework action, and then you could do a separate plan amendment, that you would do in conjunction with the Gulf Council, to update the goals and objectives and revise those other management changes that came out of port meetings.

That is one decision point that we're going to need from you all today, is whether you want to do one single big amendment for everything or restart Framework 13 to just do Spanish mackerel catch levels, and then do everything else in a plan amendment, and I will come back to that decision point in a second, because I think it might be helpful for you to sort of have an idea of, when I say management things that came up during port meetings, what exactly that could entail.

This is a list that I put together, sort of going through all of the notes and saying these are things that brought were brought up, and these are things you could consider for inclusion in a larger amendment. Sector allocations for Spanish mackerel, commercial zone allocations for Spanish mackerel, and, again, that's the allocation between that northern and southern zone. Looking at changing the zones, and that was something that was brought up at a couple of port meetings, and do you want to keep the line for those two zones the same?

You could look at accountability measures for Spanish mackerel. I think, under the new stock assessment, that's something that's going to need to be considered. You could look at recreational bag and size limits for Spanish mackerel, commercial trip limits for Spanish and king mackerel, sale of tournament-caught king mackerel, and limited entry for the commercial Spanish mackerel permit. Those were sort of the big topics that came out.

There was also limited entry for the CMP for-hire permit, and you're already considering that in another amendment, and then, of course, recreational permitting and reporting for CMP species. That was something that was brought up. You guys have talked about that in the past, and ultimately decided to move forward with just recreational permitting for snapper grouper, and that's not to say you can't revisit that decision, but just a note that, you know, you have talked about that in the past.

So, ultimately, what we will bring you in June, sort of regardless of which direction you want to take, is input from the Mackerel AP on the port meetings report and the possible amendment topics that you all are going to decide on today, a summary of information about those topics, and what we gave you today was a really broad overview of themes. What we could bring you in June is details on what was said specifically about limited entry for Spanish mackerel, and then possible action and alternative options.

We'll give you a refresher on what came out of SEDAR 78 for Spanish mackerel, and then, if you're interested, a presentation from the Gulf Council on their efforts, and so, again, a lot of information, but I feel like the first decision is one big amendment, one small and one big amendment, and then, once that's been decided, talking about what sort of actions coming out of port meetings you would like more information on.

MR. ROLLER: All right, and so I'm going to open the floor up for any comments or -- All right, Carolyn. Go ahead.

DR. BELCHER: I know it's just the reoccurring theme of where we are with the current state of ten-for-one and all of that, and I kind of lean towards the idea of wanting to see the presentation from the Gulf, to find out how much alignment we have, before trying to go single amendment or two amendments, I guess, because is there going to be a lot more discussions, especially if there's joint involvement, and I guess that's -- Again, just trying to think about how that would go. I mean, is there potential for either one or the other side halting progress on -- I don't know what their issues are, I guess is part of my big thing, and I almost feel like I need to know what they're doing before I say one or the other.

MR. ROLLER: Jessica.

MS. MCCAWLEY: I mean, I kind of agree with Carolyn, but the Gulf, I think, has postponed some work on king mackerel until the next stock assessment, but folks are also saying that they think there's a problem over there, and so it's hard for me to figure out kind of what to do here, a single amendment or two amendments, you know, especially since the -- At least one of these would have to go to the Gulf, and so it's hard for me to figure out how to resolve this and think about the next steps.

When I think about how dire people think the king mackerel situation is over there, and how they're going to feel about us sending an amendment with new FMP goals, et cetera, and so I would like to see their presentation as well, and use that to think about next steps, but, yes, I have -- I have similar concerns.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Jessica. This is good conversation, particularly in terms of trying to make things more efficient. Christina, did you want to comment on that ?

MS. WIEGAND: Yes, and so I just want to note, sort of thinking about collaboration with the Gulf, and how that would work, there are, sort of looking at these amendment topics, certain decisions that I'm -- The Gulf Council may or may not be interested in digging into, but they would affect Atlantic king or Spanish mackerel solely, and so things like sector allocations, the commercial zones, commercial allocations, accountability measures, bag limit, size limits, and those would all be specific to Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel. It's just, if they're in a plan amendment, the Gulf has to concur on the preferred alternative that you guys pick.

There are some things in this list that would require much more detailed collaboration with the Gulf Council, things like limited entry for the commercial Spanish mackerel permit. The commercial Spanish mackerel permit is a Gulf and Atlantic-wide permit, and so they would have to agree to have whatever we decide to move forward with happen in their waters as well, and then the goals and objectives, of course, are for the FMP as a whole.

You do have sort of some things that I would anticipate the Gulf Council being a little less involved with, because they solely affect Atlantic migratory group, and then other things on this list that would require really close collaboration with the Gulf Council.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Christina. I'm going to go Andy.

MR. STRELCHECK: Yes, and, piggybacking on Carolyn's comments, I guess I'm, one, still wanting to know guidance with regard to whether like updating catch levels is considered a non-regulatory action, right, and it's not deregulatory, it's not regulatory, and we're just updating the catch limits, right, and so that would -- If that's the case, I would lean toward two amendments, because I feel like we would really get bogged down with some of these really meaty topics in a big plan amendment.

Then, with the plan amendment, of course, I was looking through, and listening to the presentation, and kind of hoping for are these some deregulatory things that we could be thinking about, and I'm not seeing a whole lot. There may be a few bits and pieces here, but I think we also need to be thinking about kind of what should we take on, you know, that would potentially be regulatory, what's a nice to have, but maybe it's not the right time, given the new environment we're working in, and could wait, right, and so I'm not ready to, I think, whittle down this list, by any means, but I think our thought process needs to surround, you know, what we really feel is necessary to move forward with and consider in the short-term, and be responsive to the port meetings, because I think that's really important as well.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Andy. Your points are well taken. I would point out, personally, and we heard public comment on this, and I'm hesitant to pick up CMP Framework Amendment 13, particularly because of the how it affected the recreational fishery.

Correct me if I'm wrong, Christina, but that would be updating to the FES numbers, correct, and not looking at allocations, really changes to the recreational fishery, potentially closing it earlier, having very restrictive bag limits, and that was one of the top things we heard from stakeholders during the port meetings, and this is something they don't want to see, right, and, particularly, they don't feel that there's a need for it, and so, if we're going to -- You know, how we look at Spanish mackerel, I think we have to look at a little deeper than that, so we don't go down that road. It seems like the conversation -- Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I'm just trying to think through this too, with everything up -- I guess I agree with you, Tom, about the Regulatory Amendment 13. I mean, the whole reason we stopped it was because we -- Or we paused it was because of the FES numbers, and impacts to rec, and put it off, and let's hear from the port meetings, and so I wondering, and is it possible -- Then, going off what Christina was saying, if we did a single amendment, and then pulled it and worked on the topics that were Atlantic-centric, the -- I mean, the sector allocations, the commercial zones, and, I mean, that seems like a big deal thing.

The bag limits, and size limits, trip limits, you know, those things that are Atlantic-centric, and go with those, and then I'm not -- I'm not sure how the Gulf piece would fall in place, if that would be a separate for them, or they pile on in this one for their issues, and I'm not sure how that process works, but that was sort of my thinking in doing one amendment, but maybe just Atlantic-centric.

MS. WIEGAND: So, really, in terms of collaborating with the Gulf, the difference lies in whether it can be a framework amendment or whether it has to be a full plan amendment. If it can be a framework amendment, and it only addresses Atlantic Spanish mackerel, we can do that sort of unilaterally, but there's a limit to what can be addressed via a framework, and so it would only be things like bag limits, size limits, and accountability measures could be done through a framework.

Anything like allocations, changes to zones, and things like that have to be done via a plan amendment, and, once it's a plan amendment, it has to be done in coordination with the Gulf, even if it's only addressing Atlantic mackerel, and so that's sort of the difference.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Christina. That's a really important clarification for us to consider in this process. From what I'm seeing in the conversation, obviously, we have a desire to look at everything -- You look at a lot of these major issues, as addressed by our stakeholders, but, at the same time, we're looking for some guidance on how to do this in the most efficient way possible, right, and we may just not quite be there yet, and is that what I'm seeing from folks? Okay. I'm seeing a lot of nodding heads.

MS. WIEGAND: So, if that's the case, I think my proposal, moving forward, would be first to make sure that this list of topics to bring more information back to you guys is sufficient, and there's nothing on here that you're like, gut feeling, that's absolutely missing, and please add that to the list, or anything on here that you're like that that's absolutely a no-go, but, otherwise, in June, what I would plan to bring you is more detailed information on what we heard about these specific topics during port meetings, as well as maybe we can work with Gulf staff to see about a possible plan forward that our staffs together would like to propose, and then a presentation on what they learned through their process, and is that what I'm hearing is sort of a preferred path forward from the council?

MR. ROLLER: Robert, and then Carolyn.

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: Just some information I think would help is also understanding what the state bag limits are for king mackerel. I mean, like Florida is two, and federal waters is three, and just, as a general observation, I don't think on -- At least for my part of the state, there's not rec trips that are going out trying to catch a bag limit of kingfish, and it's kind of incidental. I've never heard of a single trip coming in with a recreational bag limit for the boat, and so I think there's probably sufficient opportunity there.

MR. ROLLER: Okay. Thank you, Robert. That's definitely my own experience, and we heard that from a lot of people, that no one really -- They like they like the availability of king mackerel, and they like catching them incidentally, or targeted, but rarely do people want to keep the full back limit, and so the next name on the list is Carolyn, and then Trish.

DR. BELCHER: So, thinking on efficiency, and again showing my ignorance to what joint plans are considered, but, if one of the potential topics is recreational permitting, should that be something that a joint amendment for the rec permitting or -- I'm just giving thoughts, and ideas, and, again, I know, just based on how we looked at our state permit, as it's currently written, it's a mix of the two, but I just didn't know if that's something that's of consideration or you -- Like I said, you can kick me later, off-mic, for it.

MS. WIEGAND: Well, I would say that's up to the council, if you want to consider recreational permitting for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel. That's something that we can bring back information on. It would have to, and correct me if I'm wrong, but I don't believe that would be a framework-able action, and so it would be something that would have to be done in a plan amendment, but could be done just for the Atlantic migratory groups.

MR. ROLLER: Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I was just going to say what Christina suggested is fine, just bring back all that information, and we can go forward from there, and so --

MR. ROLLER: Go ahead, Christina.

MS. WIEGAND: So, if you want us to bring back information on recreational permitting, do you want it for all CM species or just the two mackerels, and so, Gulf cobia, yes or no?

MR. ROLLER: Looking around the table, I'm not seeing heads nodding yes or no, and I see some shrugging shoulders, but that doesn't really help me out. Go ahead, Carolyn.

DR. BELCHER: Again, I'll just throw it out there, because, for us, Doug recognizes it as nine species, and cobia is our ninth species. However, in Georgia, cobia is ASMFC territory and not federal territory.

MR. ROLLER: Go ahead, Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: Just looking at the list of what you wanted to bring back, do we really need to talk about limited entry or recreational permitting at this point? I mean, just sitting around talking about recreational permitting and how it's been with snapper grouper, if that's just another -- Just a bridge too far at this point, those two things, the limited entry, at this point in time, and the recreational permitting.

MR. ROLLER: A question for you, Trish. When you say limited entry, are you referring to the commercial side of it or the for-hire side of it, or rec?

MS. MURPHEY: What's listed here, the for-hire, and the only reason I say that is, you know, we're still waiting on information from the permitting people, and, you know, I just wondered -- I'm not saying don't consider it, but I just sort of -- In trying to think of workload, what may be doable, this may not be doable at this point in time, the -- I'm talking about this slide.

MS. WIEGAND: So what's up here -- I will say what I didn't include up here were limited entry for for-hire, because that's something that you guys are already talking about in a separate amendment, and so I didn't feel like it needed to be talked about as a part of this, since it's already being addressed elsewhere.

Recreational permitting I've added back to the list. It's in italics on the slide because that's something you guys have said you didn't want to move forward with in the past, but, again, that's not to say you can't now say you do want to consider moving forward with it for Atlantic king and Spanish mackerel.

MR. ROLLER: Go ahead, Trish.

MS. MURPHEY: I guess what I was thinking, as far as taking the recreational permitting off the list, is, as much as we've gotten wrapped around the axle with some snapper grouper, I just wonder

if that just may be one -- Like I said, a bridge too far at this at this point in time, and not to say it's not needed, or important, but how doable will it be.

MR. ROLLER: So what's the pleasure of the committee on that? I'm looking for any acknowledgement. You want to go ahead, Robert?

MR. SPOTTSWOOD: I mean, didn't -- At the end of the last discussion about federal permitting, didn't we determine we were going to go after -- I mean, if you're fishing in federal waters for anything, you need to have a permit. We talked about snapper grouper species, but then, at one point, there's a comment about just any federally-managed species you should have to have a permit, and so I -- You know, Trish, I don't know if we're going to cover this in other contexts, and I'm just kind of agreeing that I don't know if it's going to be helpful to also cover it here.

MR. ROLLER: I mean, it's important, and we're not making any decisions here, and we're just bringing back information on it, right, and so, I mean, I would say -- I mean, we hear a lot from our APs, as well as fishermen in the port meetings, and we heard a lot of comments from our commercial fishermen regarding limited entry. I think it would -- I think we would be -- I think we at least needed to talk about that, because we heard so much about it.

Do we still want to bring some information back on recreational permitting? Does anybody feel strongly about it one way? Okay. I see some heads nodding yes, and so, if you disagree, say so now. Okay. Do we have anybody -- Any other comments or questions? It's a big undertaking, and I'm going to give it a few seconds here to see if anybody else can dig in their minds and come up with something else. All right. Well, I think that's it, if no one has anything else to add. Mr. Beal, go ahead.

MR. BEAL: Thanks. I'm just -- You know, now that there's sort of a skeleton plan coming together, I just wanted to remind the council that, you know, ASMFC -- The intentions of our Coastal Pelagic Board is to let the council take the lead on this, and then we'll follow-up. There's already -- I think there's about a half a dozen differences between the interstate plan and the federal plan, and we're going to try to sort those out, and there's trip limits, and recreational season, and gear, allowable gears, a number of other things that are different between the two plans already.

The commission's intent is to sort those out, those differences out, but then just to, you know, follow the lead of the council on quotas and any other issues that are there, and, if there's a component that needs to be included in the interstate FMP, you know, that's the intention of the commission, to keep these consistent, but we'll let the council take the lead, and so just as a reminder, and, if there's any way we can, you know, help engage the northern states more, as you go through the amendment process, or whatever it is, obviously, we're happy to do that.

MR. ROLLER: Okay. Thank you so much, and, I mean, clearly Mid-Atlantic states is -- We heard so much comment from the Virginia fishermen, and, you know, VMRC and Joe Grist were so helpful in that too, and so let's, you know, make sure that we do everything to coordinate with them. Any other comments? Amy.

MS. DUKES: Just a clarifying question. With regulations in state waters for both of these species, will that be both for recreational and commercial harvest? Okay. Thank you.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you for that important clarification. All right. Is everybody good with this list? I'm seeing heads nodding. Okay. I'll hand it over to you. Are you ready to move on?

MS. WIEGAND: Yes.

MR. ROLLER: All right. Go ahead, Christina. The next item is the Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel meeting for the spring and topics for the AP, right?

MS. WIEGAND: Yes, and so what we have on the AP's agenda right now is talking about the giant manta ray information that Jenny just presented to you all, and we'll give them the mackerel port meetings report, and sort of talk, you know, generally about some of those topics that you guys will be getting more information on in June, the for-hire reporting improvement amendment, the for-hire limited entry amendment, and then we'll be doing a lines of communication practice run with them, give them a Citizen Science Program update, and then have them review the research and monitoring plan.

I do want to note that that looks like a sort of light agenda, but the lines of communications practice run -- We're planning on doing a pretty thorough one with Mackerel AP, and that's likely to take up about three hours of time, and so it requires a decent time block to get done, and so that is what we have for you guys to approve for the AP meeting on March 31 and April 1.

MR. ROLLER: I would add, knowing this AP, they usually have a lot to say, and so it's very, very possible that one of these agenda items will take up more time than we may be considering, and so it's very easy that we will be pushing that agenda to the max, and so -- Yes, it's a very good AP, and so how is everybody with this list? Do we have any suggestions, or comments, on it? I'm seeing a lot of nodding heads, and I'm seeing some thumbs-up. Thank you, Jimmy. Who else? Amy, did you want to make comment?

MS. DUKES: I was just curious, and so a lot of this started well before my tenure, and so I was just curious if we should at least give them a quick update about today's discussions and the fact that we're not moving forward quite yet with Framework 13, and we're yet not going into a big one, but just give them a quick update, and you're going to do that with the mackerel port meeting report? Perfect. Thank you.

MR. ROLLER: Are we going to ask them to comment on that, or are we just -- We got most of the suggestions from AP members in the port meetings?

MS. WIEGAND: I'll say that most of the AP members, and not all, but most of them were able to attend a port meeting. I will say what I will probably do is sort of show the list of possible management changes, and ask for any additions, and I don't think it's feasible, in the day-and-a-half we'll have them meeting, to sort of talk through details on all of those topics, many of which are controversial.

MR. ROLLER: Thank you, Christina, and so do we have any other suggestions? All right. I've got to say we're pretty much on time, for allocated time, and I'm very proud of that, and you know my history in the past, and so I think we're good there. Unless anyone has anything else to say, I guess we can go to other business for the committee.

Does anybody have any other business to bring before the Mackerel Cobia Committee? Seeing no other business, I'll go ahead and adjourn this meeting of the Mackerel Cobia Committee and pass it over to our council chair.

(Whereupon, the meeting adjourned on March 6, 2025.)

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Certified By: _____ Date: _____

Transcribed By
Amanda Thomas
April 11, 2025

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