

**FINAL
SUMMARY REPORT
MACKEREL COBIA COMMITTEE MEETING
Jekyll Island, GA
March 8-9, 2017**

Atlantic Cobia

Following approval of the agenda and December 2016 minutes, the Committee was briefed on the ASMFC interstate plan for cobia by Bob Beal. The South Atlantic State/Federal Fisheries Management Board will review a draft plan at their May 2017 meeting, and the plan is expected to be implemented in 2018. Mr. Beal pointed out that the Council will need to set up the procedure for complementary management and provided an example of summer flounder management. The ASMFC is also concerned about MRIP data, including the upcoming recalibration, time lag for availability of recreational catches, and the discrepancies between MRIP data and the recreational catch estimates provided from the Southeast Fisheries Science Center. There was some concern about how the ASMFC will fairly allocate the available ACL (which will be set by the South Atlantic Council), especially for states with lower landings, but the ASMFC will work together and acknowledge data gaps, and figure out a way to allocate properly.

Next, Dr. Jessica Stephen (SERO) provided an overview of the 2017 recreational landings for Atlantic cobia and the analysis to determine the 2017 closure date. Following, the state representatives for Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina and Georgia provided updates on regulations for Atlantic cobia harvest in state waters.

Rob O'Reilly reported that the Virginia Marine Resources Commission (VMRC) will hold a public hearing and consider options for 2017 state regulations at their meeting on March 28, 2017. There is also mandatory reporting for cobia catch, and this will be refined at the March 2017 meeting. Mr. O'Reilly also reported on the on-going research on cobia through Virginia Institute of Marine Science (VIMS).

Dr. Michelle Duval briefed the Committee on the 2017 state regulations for North Carolina. The North Carolina Marine Fisheries Commission met in February 2017 and approved a motion to start the 2017 North Carolina cobia season May 1 and run through Aug. 31 with a 1/person/day possession limit; a 4/vessel maximum possession limit for private and charter; and a 36-inch fork length size limit, seven days per week. The charter boat limit of 4-fish-per-day includes the captain and mate, as well as customers. All cobia harvested shall be recorded and tagged at a current or future NC Citation Station location. Length and weight shall be recorded to help provide a more accurate harvest by number and weight for future reference. Dr. Duval also reported that there are funded proposals to add cobia to the state tagging program and for work on a satellite tagging program through North Carolina State University.

Mel Bell reported to the Committee on cobia management in South Carolina state waters. In 2016, South Carolina implemented new state rules to establish a "Southern Cobia Management Zone" (state waters south of Edisto to SC/GA line), in which the bag limit is 1/person with no more than 3/vessel, and no harvest May 1-May 31. State waters of South Carolina closed automatically with the recreational closure in federal waters on January 24, 2017. There is continuing work on genetics and sampling analysis, and increasing tagging programs for cobia.

Doug Haymans reported that regulations in Georgia state waters will not change at this time (state waters are open and harvest limit is 2/person), although most cobia harvest is in federal waters off Georgia. There is concern about MRIP estimates, particularly with the large variance for Georgia landings from year to year. Georgia is working with other states on a cobia tagging program.

Commercial Landings and CMP Amendment Updates

The Committee received an update on commercial landings for Atlantic king mackerel, Spanish mackerel and cobia from SERO staff. There are now two attachments posted in online briefing book so that the first Attachment 3 and updated Attachment 3 are available.

The Committee also received an update on CMP Amendment 26, which was transmitted for formal review on July 7, 2016. The proposed rule published on December 29, 2016, and the comment period closed on January 30, 2017. SERO is working on the final rule.

CMP Framework Amendment 4 was transmitted for formal review on October 28, 2016. The proposed rule published on February 21, 2017, and the comment period is open through March 23, 2017. CMP Framework Amendment 5 was transmitted for formal review on December 2, 2016. The proposed rule published on March 1, 2017, and the comment period is open through March 31, 2017.

Common Units for CMP Species

Commercial landings for Atlantic king mackerel and Atlantic Spanish mackerel, in addition to commercial and recreational landings of Atlantic cobia are tracked “as reported.” There has been some concern that actual landings may be exceeding the ACL because of the difference between gutted to whole weight conversions for some species. Dr. Michelle Duval reported to the Committee about a mapping error in data fields between ACCSP and state data that had caused issues in landings tracking. The Committee directed staff to draft a letter to the Gulf Council and SERO/SEFSC to explore options to have a common unit for tracking CMP species, and necessary Council actions to update the current system.

Gulf Council Report

Council staff reported on the January/February 2017 Gulf Council meeting. The Gulf Council approved a motion to postpone Amendment 29 indefinitely due to hesitation from the recreational sector and pending changes to MRIP estimates in 2018.

CMP Amendment 29 (Gulf king mackerel quota share)

At their January/February 2017 meeting, the Gulf Council approved a motion to postpone Amendment 29 indefinitely.

**MOTION #1. POSTPONE AMENDMENT 29 INDEFINITELY.
APPROVED BY COMMITTEE. APPROVED BY COUNCIL.**

Mackerel Cobia Advisory Panel and Cobia Sub-Panel Agenda Items

The Mackerel Cobia AP and Cobia Sub-Panel are scheduled to meet April 19-20, 2017. Council staff proposed bringing the AP and Sub-Panel together at this meeting to provide orientation for new members, and to allow all members to participate in the discussions. The Committee provided guidance on items to include on the agenda for the April 2017 meeting.

Other Business- Emergency Action for Atlantic Cobia

Dr. Michelle Duval raised the issue that fishermen have requested that the Council recommend NMFS take emergency action on Atlantic cobia to open recreational harvest in some capacity. The Committee expressed clarification on if emergency action was an option for Atlantic cobia due to the January 24, 2017, closure, and how information that could affect the stock boundary determination could apply to an emergency rule request. NOAA GC and SERO reviewed the criteria for an emergency rule and the Committee discussed if there was adequate reason to request that NMFS consider an emergency rule. The Committee requested a white paper on emergency rule criteria and how the recreational closure and stock boundary for Atlantic cobia may qualify or not qualify for emergency action.

MOTION #2. ADOPT THE TIMING AND TASK MOTION. APPROVED BY COUNCIL.

TIMING AND TASKS

- 1) Council staff will draft a letter to the Gulf Council and SERO/SEFSC to explore options to have a common unit for tracking CMP species, and for NMFS guidance on the necessary Council actions to update the current system.

- 2) Council staff will work with SERO and NOAA GC on a discussion document with emergency rule criteria and how the recreational closure and stock boundary for Atlantic cobia may or may not qualify for emergency action, to be included on the agenda at the AP/Sub-Panel meeting.

- 3) Provide the Mackerel Cobia AP and Cobia Sub-Panel meeting report to the ASMFC for their May 2017 meeting.